

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

# 境界線上の ホライゾン VI

上

か-5-44



GENESISシリーズ  
境界線上のホライゾンⅥ(上)

川上  
稔



電撃文庫



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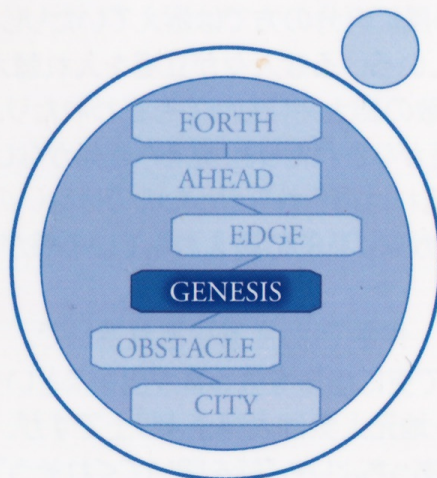


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The 1st.GENESIS

## ■毛利・輝元■

毛利・元就の孫、と言っても解りにくいかもしれません。  
よく、決断力の無いキャラとして扱われていたりしますが、  
最近の研究とか見ていると、  
トータルでは意外にやることやっていたりで。  
家臣団が気を回しすぎな面もありますな。  
有能なセンスがある一方で、  
状況の把握が出来ていないと言うか、  
経験と時代、周囲環境がその花咲を明確にさせなかった、  
という風に自分の方では捉えていたりします。  
何だかんだで、いろいろな人々が立場を入れ替えていた時代、  
敵の総大将になっても庇われたり、  
後の保証がなされたりと、見るべき処がないならば、  
そのような流れは得られなかったのではないのかな、とか。  
ここらへん、かなり私的に肩入れしている感がありますが。

作中では、乱暴な言葉遣いで、  
芯が強い上で更に虚栄を張る事が出来るという面倒な人。  
地元人気は太陽王より上ですが、  
あっちよりも“話を聞いてくれそう”  
“真剣に考えてくれそう”な部分によるものです。  
基本、自動人形達の総大将な立場にあって、  
人間の戦士団は後方に。  
彼女達が前線に出るようになっています。

デザイン的にはヤンキー系。  
髪飾りはかなり巨大で、  
弓と三本の矢をイメージしたものだったりで。  
ここらへんは親父(肉親ではなく、襲名者)の関わった  
“三本の矢”に由来しています。

(川上稔)

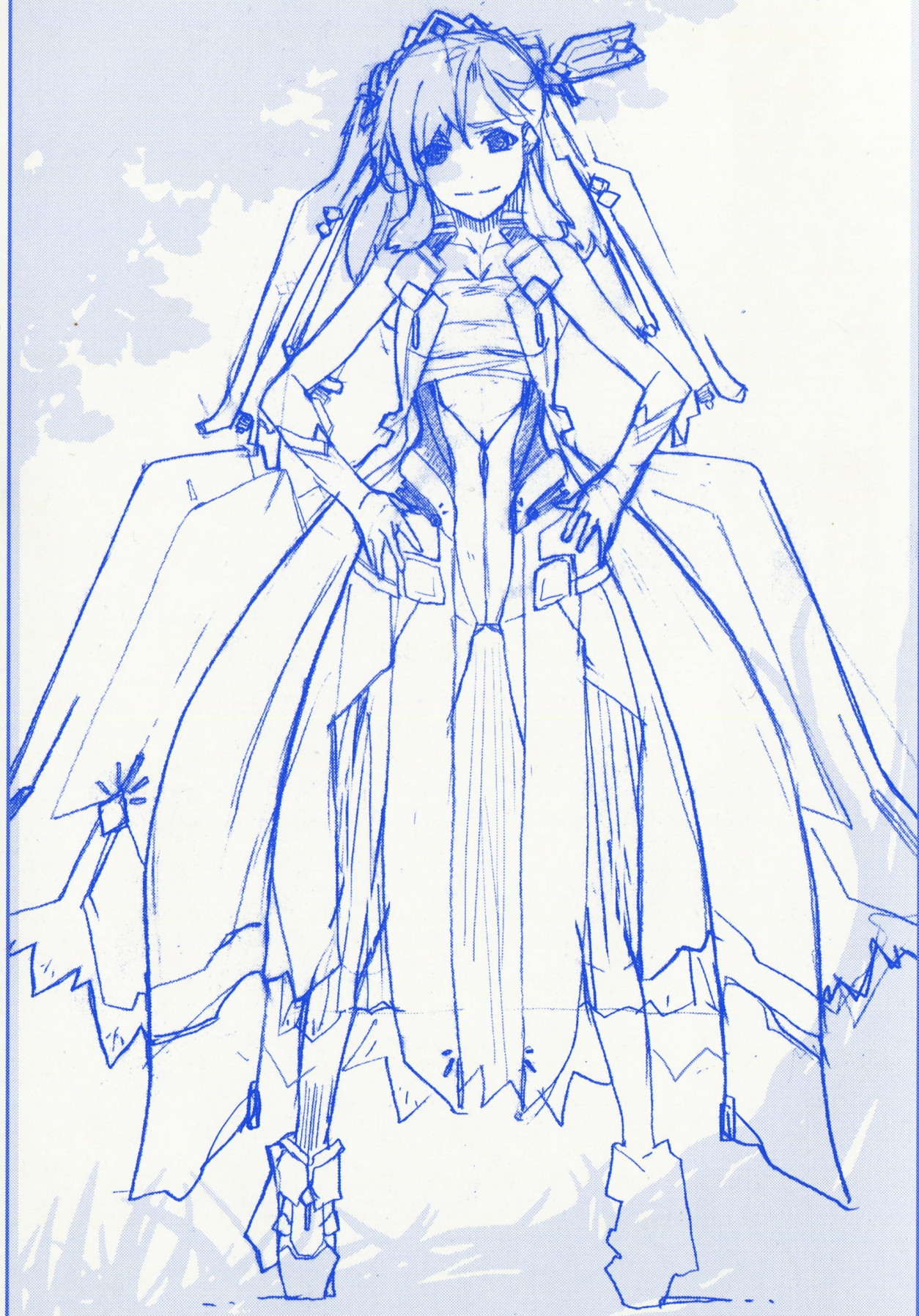


——早く布陣を固めねばなりません。



# Installation

installation



installation

## Mouri Terumoto

Calling him Mouri Motonari's grandson might not really tell you much.

He is often presented as someone who can't make a decision, but looking at more recent research, he did a surprising amount in the big picture.

Part of that was his retainers reading too much into things.

I guess you could say he was sensible, but he had a bad grasp of the situation. Or maybe that his experiences, the age, and his surrounding environment did not play to his strengths. That's how I see it anyway.

A lot of people moved between different positions in that age and he ended up protecting them even when they became the enemy supreme commander and there was no guarantee of what would happen later. Without those points, things might have turned out differently for him. All of that is really just the view I personally support, though.

In the novels, she has a rough speech pattern and is a troublesome person who can lay out vainglory on top of an already tough core.

She is more popular among the locals than the Roi-Soleil, but that is because she seems more like she'll actually listen to them and think carefully about things.

Her general position is the leader of the automatons while the human warriors stay in the back.

She and the automatons are the ones who form the front line.

I gave her a delinquent design.

Her hair decoration is quite large and based on the image of a bow and three arrows.

That is based on the Three Arrows story involving her father (inherited name, not biological).

(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the  
Middle of Nowhere - 6A**



——何をするのが一番いいのかな。

VI  
上

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—What would be the best thing to do?

# Characters





# **Frightening Ariadust News**

武蔵アカダス教導院 三年梅組

# 移動教室の しおり



※背景はハメコミ合成です



「さあ、そういうわけで移動教室のしおりですよー！  
今更かよ！ とか言わない方針で！」



「ア、アデーレ、まずは洗濯っ、洗濯っ」



「いや、鈴さん、そんなの後でも大丈夫ですよ！ 大体、その制服  
誰のですか!? 何だか薄汚れて、——自分のですね!？」



「うん、アデーレ、今回、叩きつけられまくったせいか、結構  
制服の傷み、凄い、よ？」



「それはまさか、ダメージじゃなくて金がないからじゃないか？  
ああ、うん、私もそういう経験を進行中だしなあ……」



「楽しい移動教室の筈が、段々生々しくなってきましたよ!？」

Top: Musashi Ariadust Academy Class 3-Plum Title: Study Camp Guidebook

Bottom of picture: \*Background edited in.

Adele: Okay, here's the study camp guidebook! And try not to point out it's a little late for this!

Suzu: A-Adele, the laundry. We need to...finish the laundry.

Adele: C'mon, Suzu-san, we can do that later! Besides, whose uniform is that!? It's kind of filthy...it's mine, isn't it!?

Suzu: Yes, Adele, your uniform was...really worn out. Was it because...you were hit so much this time?

Masazumi: It probably wasn't the damage. I'm betting it was the lack of money. Yeah, I'm kind of going through the same thing right now...

Adele: Our study camp was supposed to be fun, but this is getting a little too real!

# Far Eastern History

## First of all

These are the lives of the people

Who lived in a period of human history when several wars coincided

Hopefully, this will help you understand something

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# Characters

● 武蔵



**葵・喜美**

トリーの姉でエロとダンスの神を信仰する。基本的に高圧で応用的に身勝手。



**葵・トリー**

主人公。武蔵アリアダスト学院の総長兼生徒会長。“不可能男”。



**浅間・智**

武蔵の主社である浅間神社の娘。トリーや喜美の幼馴染み兼人生の被害者。



**東**

帝の子供で半神。能力など全て封じられて武蔵で生活する。



**アデーレ・バルフェット**

仏蘭西から流れてきた従士家系。眼鏡娘。



**伊藤・健児**

快活なインキュバス。全裸で禿のマッスル系。通称イケン。



**御広敷・銀二**

ハート様系体格の食通でオタク。



**キヨナリ・ウルキアガ**

第二特務。航空系半竜で異端審問官志望。通称ウッキー。



**シロジロ・ベルトニー**

会計。武蔵の商工会の若手幹部。



**点蔵・クロスユナイト**

第一特務。いつも帽子などで顔を隠す忍者で使い走り。



**トゥーサン・ネシンバラ**

書記。歴史好きの作家志望者で同人作家。



**直政**

第六特務。機関部で働く姉御。煙草はふかすわデカイ声で笑うわで。



**ネイト・ミツダイラ**

第五特務。水戸松平の襲名者で騎士家系。人狼ハーフ。



**ネンジ**

HP3くらいのスライム。男らしい。



**ノリキ**

家族を支える勤労少年。不器用型格闘家。無口で無愛想。



**ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー**

会計補佐。シロジロのパートナーで白狐エリマキつき。



**ハッサン・フルブシ**

カルピスマーク系インド人。カレーだけ食って飲んで生きてる。



**ペルソナ君**

バケツヘルムの超マッチョ。無口で怪力で心優しい。



**ホライゾン・アリアダスト**

トリーの幼馴染みで現三河君主。現在自動人形中。感情が大罪武装の部品として奪われている。



**本多・二代**

元三河の学生。本多・忠勝の息女。自称拙者、御座る語尾の濃い目。



**本多・正純**

副会長。昨年度の三河からの真面目転入生。いろいろ家庭の事情あり。



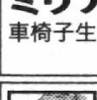
**マルガ・ナルゼ**

第四特務。黒髪六枚翼の白魔術師。漫研所属。



**マルゴット・ナイト**

第三特務。金髪六枚翼の黒魔術師。笑い顔の方。



**ミリアム・ポークウ**

車椅子生活のため、在宅就学している少女。



**向井・鈴**

目が見えないけど頑張る少女。皆のストッパー。



**立花・宗茂**

元三征西班牙第一特務。アモーレ。現在は襲名解除で再起願中。



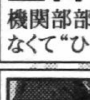
**立花・間**

元三征西班牙第三特務。宗茂の嫁で砲撃系義腕少女。五十回。



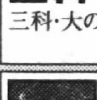
**メアリ・スチュアート**

英国女王エリザベスの異母姉。金髪巨乳。点蔵の未来嫁として同居中。王賜剣一型のオーナー。



**三科・大**

機関部部長の孫娘。メカ好き。直政の後輩にあたる。“だい”じゃなくて“ひろ”。



**三科・翔一**

三科・大の父。泰造の義理の息子。関東IZUMOの長。



**里見・義康**

里見教導院生徒会長の少女。小さくても泣かない。武神“義”を操る。



**大久保・忠隣／長安**

極東には珍しい二重襲名の代表委員長。二年。インチキ関西弁。

character

# character



**かのう  
加納**

大久保の侍女。自動人形。風紀委員長。二年。



**だて しげ まさ (なるみ)  
伊達・成実**

政宗の従弟役。伊達家の副長で、機動殻”不転百足”を使用。余裕あり気味おねーさん風。

## ●教導院関係者



**おりおとらい・まきこ  
オリオトライ・真喜子**

高速戦闘型女教師。いつもジャージ。



**さかい たつぐ  
酒井・忠次**

武蔵アリアダスト学院学長。昔はかなり出来る人でしたが左遷。



**むさし  
“武蔵”**

武蔵を統括する自動人形で総艦長。辛辣口調がたまりません。

**ヨシナオ**

六護式仏蘭西から派遣された武蔵王。教導院への否決権と武蔵の管理権を持つ。



**さんよう みつ き  
三要・光紀**

三年竹組の担任。オリオトライを先輩と仰ぐ。何か微妙に不幸。

## ●M.H.R.R.



**はしげ どう きち ろう  
羽柴・藤吉郎**

M.H.R.R.副会長、自動人形の猿面少女。おどおどボンバー系。

**オリンピア**

インノケンティウスの義姉にして義妹。現教皇総長。



**マティアス**

M.H.R.R.旧派の代表。総長兼生徒会長。傀儡楽しいです!



**まえ だ とし いえ  
前田・利家**

旧派の代表。会計。霊体になっており、妻の“まつ”と日々平穩に中間職。



**ふくしま まさ のり  
福島・正則**

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー1。御座ります語尾を使用する。



**か とう きよ まさ  
加藤・清正**

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー2。金髪巨乳系で丁寧口調。



**たけ なか はん べ え  
竹中・半兵衛**

十本槍の九番。羽柴の軍師。長寿族のお気楽姉さん。聖譜記述では毛利攻めの前に死亡するので、黒田・官兵衛も二重襲名。



**かた ぎり かつ もと  
片桐・且元**

十本槍の十番。真面目少年で交渉役などもこなす。かなり遊ばれ気味だけど気にせず男らしく頑張ります!



**か とう よし あき  
加藤・嘉明**

十本槍の四番。金髪金翼の白魔術師。鋭い口調でものを言う一方で、意外に全体のまとめ役。



**わき さか やす はる (アンジー)  
脇坂・安治**

十本槍の五番。黒髪黒翼の黒魔術師。お気楽系だが、本当にお気楽系。場の流れをパワーアップ。

## ●P.A.Oda



**さつ さ なり まさ  
佐々・成政**

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。ヤンキー系で突撃派。でも几帳面。



**しば た かつ いえ  
柴田・勝家**

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。体育会系。最近結婚して困りもの。



**ふ わ みつ はる  
不破・光治**

P.A.Odaの対上越露西亜現地会計。利家、成政と三人で“三人衆”と呼ばれる。



**お い ち  
御市**

柴田・勝家の妻。おっとり系バーサーカー。



**もり なが よし  
森・長可**

P.A.Odaの中で最も雄度が高い好青年。インパクトの瞬間にヘッドが回る。



**たき がわ いち ます  
滝川・一益**

築城や艦船操作に秀でたP.A.Odaの忍者武将。

# character

## ●伊達



### 伊達・政宗

伊達家の当主。竜神の力を受け継いでいる。伊達家の総長兼生徒会長でもある。



### 義姫

政宗の母。鬼型長寿族と人間のハーフ。仙台伊達教導院の学長。



### 片倉・小十郎

伊達家の副会長。テンション上下が激しいが選沢式。

## ●六護式仏蘭西



### ルイ・エクシヴ

六護式仏蘭西総長。太陽王の爽やか好青年。神の血を引く。



### 毛利・輝元

六護式仏蘭西生徒会長。エクシヴの妻。ヤンキー系。将来、西軍の長として武蔵側の敵に回る運命。



### 三銃士のアンリ

戦闘系の女性型自動人形。リーダー格で、輝元の護衛役。制御式大刀の使い手。



### 三銃士のアルマン

戦闘系の男性型自動人形。広範囲重力制御の使い手。



### 人狼女王

チュレンヌ。六護式仏蘭西の副長。ミトツダイラの母ちゃん。かなり大雑把な巨乳。



### ミトツダイラの父

人狼女王の旦那。幸せいっぱいであつ泣いてしまう被害者。受け身と言うより攻め込まれ派。二十四日。

## ●北条



### 北条・氏直

北条印度諸国連合の総長兼生徒会長。鬼型長寿族だが、自動人形の身体となっている。



### 小太郎

氏直についている少女忍者型の走狗。優秀なのだが子供扱い。

## ●真田



### 真田・信之

真田の生徒会長兼総長。偉いんだか偉くないんだか解らないし強いんだか強くないんだか解らないけど長生きするタイプ。



### 真田・昌幸

信之のとーちゃん。真田教導院の学長。



### 海野・六郎

真田教導院の十勇士の七番。踊り子の傾奇者。舞踏型の剣術をこなす。



### 笈・十蔵

真田教導院の十勇士の十番。制御式の射撃術を用いる長身瘦軀。



### 三好・伊佐

真田教導院の十勇士の四番。別名は伊佐入道。制御式の武神を扱う少女。



### 穴山・小助

真田教導院の十勇士の五番。人の良さそうな顔の男。忍術をこなす。



### 由利・謙之介

真田教導院の十勇士の六番。剣術を得意とする。



### 根津・陣八

真田教導院の十勇士の八番。狙撃を得意とする。



### 望月・幸忠

十勇士の九番。自動人形で爆砕術式を扱う。

# character

## ● Musashi

- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa.

Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.

- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.
- Date Shigezane [Narumi]: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident

elder sister type.

## ● Academy Officials

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

## ● M.H.R.R.

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.
- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.
- Takenaka Hanbei: Ten Spears #9. Hashiba's tactician. Carefree long-lived girl. Dies before the invasion of Mouri according to the Testament, but has also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei.
- Katagiri Katsumoto: Ten Spears #10. Diligent boy who fills the negotiator role among others. Used as a plaything a lot, but he won't let it get to him and will do his best like a man!

- Katou Yoshiaki: Ten Spears #4. Gold-haired, gold-winged Weiss Hexen. Speaks sharply, but surprisingly tends to act as a mediator.
- Wakisaka Yasuharu (Angie): Ten Spears #5. Black-haired, black-winged Schwarz Hexen. The carefree type, but she truly is carefree. She powers up the flow of things.

## ● P.A. Oda

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Mori Nagayoshi: Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.
- Takigawa Ichimasu: P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

## ● Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

## ● Mogami Clan

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Shakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

## ● Hexagone Française

- Louis Exiv: Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.
- Mouri Terumoto: Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.
- Henri of the Three Musketeers: Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.
- Armand of the Three Musketeers: Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.
- Reine de Garou: Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom. All-around giant breasts.
- Mitotsudaira's Father: The Reine des Garous's husband. A victim who is full of happiness and readily cries. Not so much passive as always under attack. 24 days.

## ● Houjou

- Houjou Ujinao: Chancellor and student council vice president of the Houjou Association of Indian States. A demonic long-lived, but has an automaton body.
- Kotarou: Ninja girl Mouse that accompanies Ujinao. Skilled but gets treated like a child.

## ● Sanada

- Sanada Nobuyuki: Sanada's Student Council President and Chancellor. Unclear if he's important or not and unclear if he's strong or not, but he is the type to live a long time.
- Sanada Masayuki: Nobuyuki's daddy. Principal of Sanada Academy.
- Unno Rokurou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #7. Eccentric dancer. Uses a dancing style of swordplay.
- Kakei Juuzou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #10. Tall skinny man who uses a remote-controlled shooting technique.

- Miyoshi Isa: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #4. AKA Isa Nyuudou. Girl who uses a remote-controlled god of war.
- Anayama Kosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #5. Looks like a nice guy. Uses ninja techniques.
- Yuri Kamanosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #6. Specializes in sword fighting.
- Nezu Jinpachi: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #8. Specializes in sniping.
- Mochizuki Yukitada: Ten Braves #9. Automaton who uses explosion spells.

# Glossary

・御館の乱【おたてのらん】:上杉家内における謙信死後の跡目相続争い。上杉・景勝と長尾・景虎が争い、景勝が勝利した。

## か行

- ・改易:お家取り潰しのこと。
- ・外燃拝気:自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。
- ・旧派【カトリック】:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。
- ・行事:教導院が各学期中などにこなさなければいけない儀式や試験など学業を示す。これを遂行しなければ対外的政治行為などは行えない。
- ・教導院:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。
- ・教譜:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。
- ・極東:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。
- ・K.P.A.Italia:安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。
- ・賢鉱石、賢水:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。
- ・校則法:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

## さ行

- ・暫定議会:武蔵において、生徒会や総長連合、委員会の官僚となる大人達の組織。
- ・清らか大市【サンメルカド】:三征西班牙のブランド。
- ・Shaja【シャージャー】:ムラサイ圏における“了解”の意。本来は勇気を示す語の表音。
- ・Jud.【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】:咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。
- ・重奏世界:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。
- ・重奏統合争乱:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。
- ・重奏領域:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、砕けながら現実側に合一した箇所。
- ・襲名:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。
- ・術式:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。

## あ行

- ・黒金侍【アイゼンリッター】:M.H.R.R.改派領邦の主企業。
- ・ArchsArt:“大属の芸術”。英国の主企業。
- ・安土城:P.A.Odaが有する巨大航空戦艦。
- ・尼子家:元IZUMOの地。毛利と六護式仏蘭西によって滅亡。
- ・天津乞神令教導院【あまつごいしんれいきょうどういん】:黎明の時代に存在した初期の教導院。学問の場というより、導きの前線基地だった。
- ・有明:関東IZUMOによる武蔵専用浮きドック。
- ・アルマダの海戦:英国と三征西班牙の間に生じた海戦。三征西班牙が英国上陸を画策したが壊滅する。
- ・出雲産業座(IZUMO):極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。
- ・英国【イングランド】:浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。
- ・ヴェストファーレン条約:三十年戦争などの講和条約。
- ・H.R.R.M.:“神聖騎士団鉄工会”。M.H.R.R.旧派領邦の主企業。
- ・女神万歳【エウロパ】:六護式仏蘭西の主企業。
- ・六護式仏蘭西【エグザゴンフランセーズ】:毛利家+フランスのこと。
- ・王賜剣【エクスカリバー】:一型と二型がある。
- ・ATELL:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。
- ・見下し魔山【エーデルブロッケン】:魔術ブランド。本社所在不明。
- ・M.H.R.R.:羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。
- ・七部六仙道【オアト】:中国の仙道を基礎とした教譜。
- ・奥州:東北地域のこと。東側を伊達家。西側を最上家が治める。
- ・奥州藤原(平泉):奥州の南側にある長寿族の隠れ里。
- 大返し【おおかえし】:信長暗殺の際、毛利攻めを行っていた羽柴が全軍をとって返したこと。二〇〇キロほどの道のりを、十日弱で走破したムチャ行軍。

では禁止。

・**超祝福艦隊**:アルマダ海戦用の三征西班牙の艦隊。最新鋭艦で構成。

・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。

・**Tes.【テス/テストメント】**:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**通し道歌**:江戸時代に極東に発生する童謡の試作型。

・**三征西班牙【トレスエスパンア】**:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

## な行

・**内燃拝気**:自分の中にため込んだ拝気のこと。

・**ノヴゴロド**:露西亜の西端の大商業都市。浮上都市だが、雷帝イヴァン四世の大粛清で死者の都市となった。

## は行

・**拝気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**花園**:英国にて作られた人工末世研究用の空間。

・**範鋼**:清のブランド。頑丈だけどやや荒い。

・**P.A.Oda**:織田家+オスマン。

・**非衰退調律進行**:黎明の時代に起きた、聖譜や重奏世界を作った運動。

・**秀次事件**:羽柴の甥にして次代を任されようとしていた、秀次が、羽柴の怒りをかけて自害に追い込まれた事件。理由は不明で、連座によって側室の駒姫までもが自害することになる。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**機械仕掛けの明星【フィーノアルバ】**:K.P.A.Italiaのブランド。発条式を売り物とする。

・**武家諸法度**:松平家が江戸幕府を興した後に発布する法律。武家のあり方を決めたが、一国一城や、跡継ぎ無い場合は改易など、中央集権化を進める内容。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**文禄の役**:羽柴の朝鮮侵攻。第一回目のこと。

・**白砂台座**:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。

・**人工末世**:英国の“花園”に末世研究用で作られた地脈の歪みの圧縮。

・**神格武装**:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。

・**神州**:極東のかつての呼び方。

・**清武田**:中国と武田家の合一。

・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。

・**上越露西亜【スヴィエートルーシ】**:上杉家+露西亜のこと。

・**聖協**:聖譜協奏派。上越露西亜で独自発展した旧派。

・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖譜顕装**:聖譜の持つ能力を転用するための武装。

・**精霊術**:意志を持った流体とも言える精霊に話し掛け、力を借りる原始的な術式。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制限。極東は十八歳卒業制。

## た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**大罪武装**:人間の大罪をモチーフに作られた大量破壊武装。

・**ダンハイ**:教譜の一つ。輪廻転生を主軸としている。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**地脈炉**:地脈から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈の変異を起こしやすく、爆発すると数キロ範囲が消滅して不安定化するためTsirhc教譜

・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拝気を納めること。献納。

## ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っていると言われる。俗世に関与しない。

・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

・**水戸**:奥州の南、江戸の北。ミツダイラの所領地。

・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。

・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。

・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

## ら行

・**竜属**:竜のこと。精霊系の天竜と、獣系の地竜がいて、天竜を上位とする。ゲルマン侵攻の歴史再現で覇を唱えたものの、敗北。今は各地に散っている。

・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。

・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拝気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。

・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。

・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。

・**竜脈炉**:莫大量の流体を爆発させ、半径数キロを消滅させる爆弾。羽柴が有する。

・**黎明の時代**:聖譜成立以前の時代のこと。

# A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Age of Dawn: The age before the Testament was established.
- Amako clan: Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Anti-Delay Pro-Tuning: The action taken during the Age of Dawn that led to the creation of the Testament and Harmonic World.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt: England's primary corporation.
- Ariake: Floating dock for the Musashi provided by Kantou IZUMO.
- Armada battle: A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- Artificial Apocalypse: A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.
- Avalon: A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.
- Azuchi Castle: P.A. Oda's giant aerial warship.

## **B**

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.
- Bunroku Campaign: Hashiba's invasion of Korea. The first one.

# C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Change of Rank: Having one's clan taken away.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

## D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.
- Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies: The original academies that existed during the Age of Dawn. More a guiding frontline base than a place of learning.
- Dragon Line Reactor: A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.
- Dragon Races: The dragons. There are Celestial Dragons which are spirits and Terrestrial Dragons which are beasts and the Celestial Dragons are of a higher level. They dominated during the history recreation of the Germanic invasions, but ultimately lost. They are now scattered across the land.
- Dunhi: A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

## E

- Edel Brocken: Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Eisenritter: Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

# F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

## G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.
- Great Return: When Hashiba returned with all his troops while attacking Mouri during Nobunaga's assassination. The rushed march covered about 200 km in less than ten days.

# H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- Hidetsugu Incident: Hidetsugu, Hashiba's nephew who was going to be left in charge during the next generation, earned Hashiba's anger and was forced to commit suicide. The reason is unknown, but his concubine Komahime had to commit suicide with him.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

# I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

## J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

# K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

# L

- Laws for the Samurai Clans: Laws established after the Matsudaira clan established the Edo Shogunate. It determined the status of the samurai clans, but it centralized power by declaring a 'Change of Rank' if a clan or castle had no heir.
- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

# M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mito: South of Oushuu and north of Edo. Mitotsudaira's territory.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

# N

- Novgorod: A large trade city on the western end of Russia. It is a floating city, but became a city of the dead after Ivan IV the Terrible's purge.

# O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Official Events: Refers to the ceremonies, exams, *etc.* that an academy must complete during each term. If these are not completed, the academy may not take part in any external politics.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.
- Orthodox: The Orthodox Concerto religion. Sviet Rus's unique branch of Catholicism.
- Oushuu: The Tohoku region. The Date clan rules the east and the Mogami clan rules the west.
- Oushuu Fujiwara (Hiraizumi): A hidden village of the long-lived in southern Oushuu.

## P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsrhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

# Q

- Qing-Takeda: Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

# R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

## S

- San Mercado: Tres Españan brand.
- Shaja: Used in Mlasi regions and means “understood”. Originally meant “courage”.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO’s shrine brand.
- Siege of Otate: Conflict over the succession of the Uesugi clan after Kenshin’s death. Uesugi Kagekatsu and Nagao Kageatora fought and Kagekatsu won.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion’s basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Spirit Spell: Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy’s domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.

# T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsrhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

# World

## ●実況通神呼び名一覧●

- ・あすま : 東
- ・あさま : 浅間・智
- ・いんび : 伊藤・健児 (イトケン)
- ・俺 : 葵・トーリ
- ・金マル : マルゴット・ナイト
- ・義 : 里見・義康
- ・傷有り : メアリ・スチュアート
- ・銀 狼 : ネイト・ミトツダイラ
- ・現役娘 : 人狼女王
- ・賢姉様 : 葵・喜美
- ・481 : 三科・翔一
- ・立花夫 : 立花・宗茂
- ・立花嫁 : 立花・闇
- ・煙草女 : 直政
- ・十Z〇 : 点蔵・クロスユナイト
- ・蜻蛉切 : 本多・二代
- ・粘着王 : ネンジ
- ・83 : ハッサン・フルブシ
- ・貧従士 : アデーレ・バルフェット
- ・副会長 : 本多・正純
- ・ベ ル : 向井・鈴
- ・ホラ子 : ホライゾン・アリアダスト
- ・● 画 : マルガ・ナルゼ
- ・○べ屋 : ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー
- ・347 : 三科・大
- ・未熟者 : トゥーサン・ネシンバラ
- ・武蔵王 : ヨシナオ
- ・眼 鏡 : シェイクスピア
- ・礼賛者 : 御広敷・銀二
- ・労働者 : ノリキ
- ・不退転 : 伊達・成実
- ・景綱君 : 片倉・小十郎
- ・牙 : 鬼庭・綱元
- ・留守居 : 留守・政景
- ・三立申 : 滝川・一益
- ・大先輩 : 柴田・勝家
- ・お12 : 御市
- ・百合花 : 佐々・成政
- ・お前田 : 前田・利家
- ・ふわあ : 不破・光治
- ・モリー : 森・長可
- ・九尾娘 : 最上・義光
- ・繁 子 : 本庄・繁長
- ・かげV : 上杉・景勝
- ・朝の部 : 斉藤・朝信
- ・長安定 : 大久保・忠隣
- ・CAN : 加納
- ・しとお : 福島・正則
- ・巨 正 : 加藤・清正
- ・□□凸 : 片桐・且元
- ・黒 竹 : 竹中・半兵衛
- ・きめえ : 加藤・嘉明
- ・AnG : 脇坂・安治
- ・6 : 蜂須賀・小六
- ・杏 里 : アンリ
- ・ある男 : アルマン

## 簡易あらすじ

さて、前回の展開だけど、私の方ではキヨナリについてうろうろしていたようなものだから、あまり引きはないわね。カレーが美味しかったわ。あと、その後にのんだ酒も。

でも地竜と天竜を倒し、第一次上田合戦を終了させたけど、最後には六護式仏蘭西と毛利が、北条と組んで喧嘩売ってきたわね。

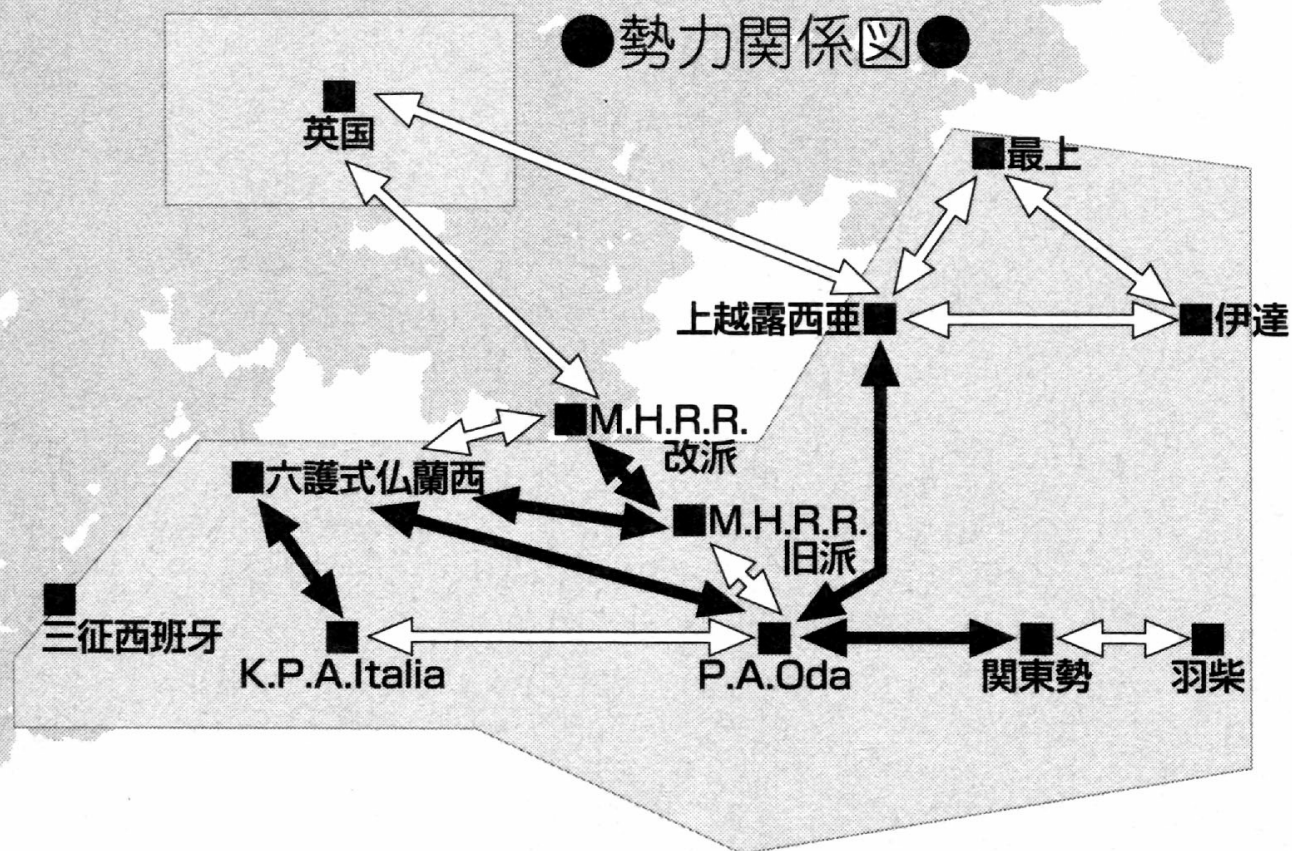
どうなるのかしら。

あ  
ま  
っ  
た  
わ  
ね  
。



world

## ●勢力関係図●



■極東（武蔵）

- 三征西班牙
- ↔ K.P.A.Italia
- ↔ 英国
- ↔ M.H.R.R.改派
- ↔ M.H.R.R.旧派
- ↔ 六護式仏蘭西
- ↔ P.A.Oda
- 関東勢
- ↔ 伊達
- ↔ 上越露西亞
- ↔ 最上

↔ 協働  
↔ 敵対

無矢印は放置  
または緩い警戒

## ●武蔵の現状●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 何か毛利と北条とかやってきたけど、これから戦争か!?!」



「フフフ戦弟? いきなり敵がドカンと来たって感じで、ミトカーちゃんも大ハシャギだけど、まずこちらがすべきは向こうの真意を探る事ね。こっちのスタンスも再確認だから、ちょっと文系のお時間がしら?」

## The Story So Far:

Now, about what happened last time. I mostly just wandered around with Kiyonari, so there isn't much interesting there. The curry was good. The sake we had after that was too.

We did defeat a Terrestrial Dragon and some Celestial Dragons and end the First Siege of Ueda, but then Hexagone Française and Mouri joined with Houjou and picked a fight with us.

I wonder how that's going to turn out.

Oh,

lots

of

space

left

over.

## Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi
- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin

- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji
- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Bell: Mukai Suzu
- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mal-Ga: Malga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki
- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu
- Great Upperclassmen: Shibata Katsuie
- O12: Oichi
- Lily Flower: Sassa Narimasa
- Omaeda: Maeda Toshiie
- Fuwaa: Fuwa Mitsuharu
- Mory: Mori Nagayoshi
- Nine Tail Girl: Mogami Yosahiaki
- Shigeko: Honjou Shigenaga
- KageV: Uesugi Kagekatsu
- Tomo-no-Bu: Saitou Tomonobu
- Nagaya-Stable: Ookubo Tadachika
- CAN: Kanou

- Llaf: Fukushima Masanori
- Kiyo-Massive: Katou Kiyomasa
- □□凸: Katagiri Katsumoto
- Kuro-Take: Takenaka Hanbei
- Kimee: Katou Yoshiaki
- AnG: Wakisaka Yasuharu
- 6: Hachisuka Koroku
- An-Ri: Henri
- Ar-Man: Armand

Far Eastern Powers:

[Same map as in 3-A.]

Relationships Between the Major Powers:

[Same as 4-A]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! Mouri and Houjou showed up, so are we going to war!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. War brother? The enemy just suddenly showed up and Mito's mom is having all the fun, but our first step needs to be figuring out what they're after. We also need to reconfirm our stance, so we'll probably be having a more cultured time for a while.

# School Rules

## Article 206

- When recreating the Testament descriptions, the harm to humanity must be kept to a minimum.

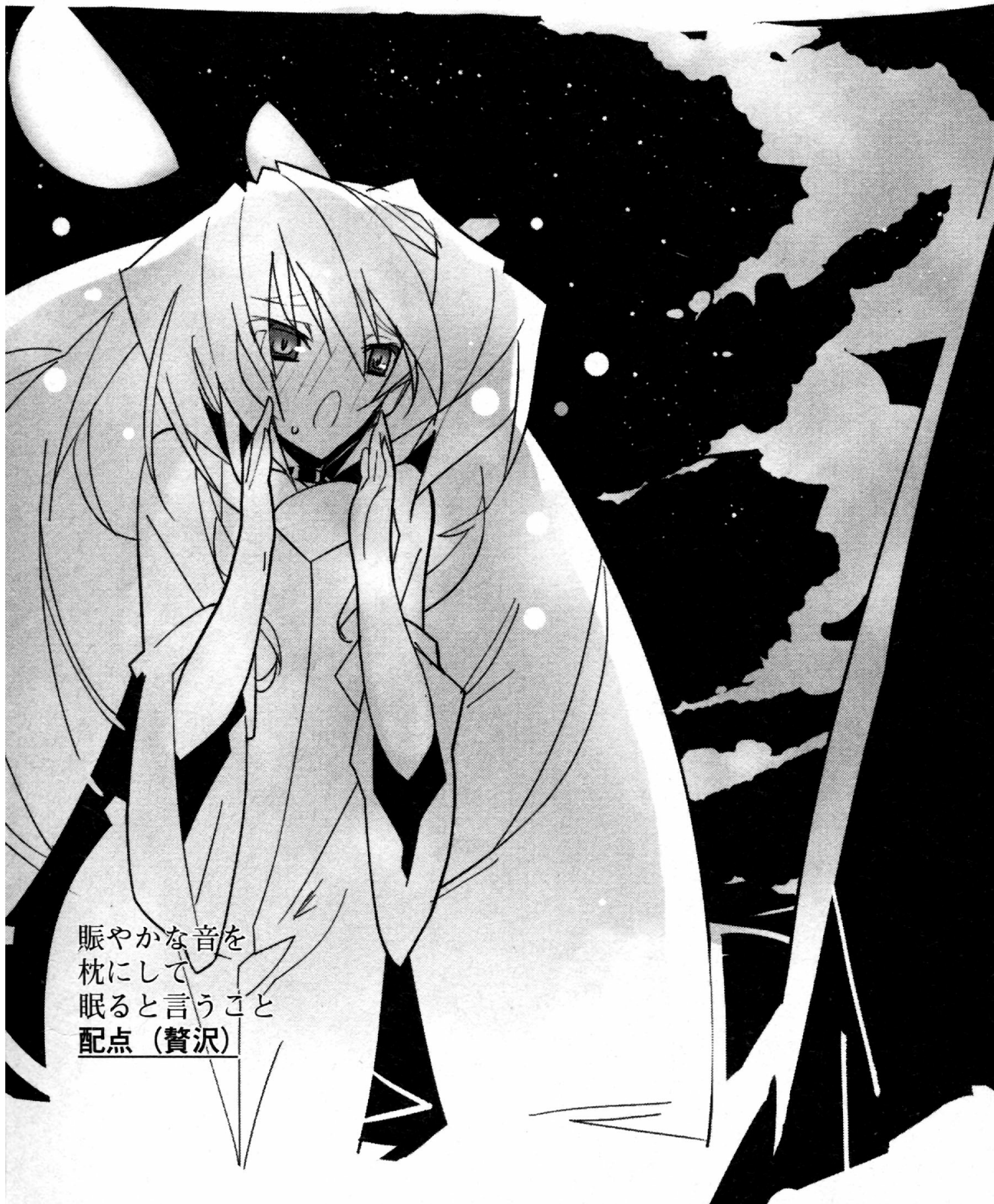
## Article 217

- If it is learned an academy is being uncooperative or is unable to recreate the Testament descriptions, a replacement opponent may be chosen.

# Prologue: Rest Area Fighter

# 序章

## 『休息場所のファイター』



賑やかな音を  
枕にして  
眠ると言うこと  
配点 (贅沢)

*It means to sleep*

*While using all the noise*

*As a pillow*

### **Point Allocation (Luxury)**

“My king! Horizon! I know you must be tired, but please wake up!”

Horizon awoke to Mitotsudaira’s voice.

*...Oh?*

She would always see the same thing when she got up: a wooden ceiling.

It belonged to the room she had been given in Tama’s underground.

The Blue Thunder’s manager had prepared it for her after taking her in a little over a year before. The manager’s investigation had shown Horizon had no home and the woman had been unable to just abandon her. She had needed a home if she was to provide tax money as a Musashi resident.

But this was not that familiar place from her everyday life.

*...Is this...?*

“Aoi-kun! Ariadust-kun! Wake up! It is currently the second night of the study camp, we spent the day defeating two Celestial Dragons for the First Siege of Ueda, we discovered new mysteries in the ruins, and the blonde version of Aoi-kun’s crossdressing set was ruined, so I imagine you are tired and would like to rest, but it is still only eight at night and Mouri is here wishing to combine the punishment of Houjou with the attack on Mouri! Mitotsudaira-kun’s mother is also here, so we would like to hold an emergency meeting about what to do! ... So wake up!”

*...That’s Neshinbara-sama for you. A superb example of exposition dialogue.*

But no one came inside the tent. And Adele commented on that fact.

“U-umm, why isn’t anyone going in?”

“Eh!? B-because I can’t spy on them in the bedroom.”

“B-but that’s...Asama-san and...Mitotsudaira-san’s tent...too...”

“Shhh!!!! What if my mother hears you from the clearing over there!?”

“It would probably lead to something funny,” said Naito.

“Yes. I’ll finally get to draw some mother-daughter material.”

Horizon thought about the conversation she heard.

*...If everyone is satisfied, perhaps it would be best to leave it like this.*

She heard the steady breathing of sleep from Toori.

If she ignored this, they could rest.

“Honestly...”

Horizon thought to herself. While glaring. *There is someone parallel to me.*

He was trying to retrieve her emotions and conquer the world.

She appreciated that, but he could not do any of it on his own.

They were a pair of parallel lines that both relied on others. Also...

“Toori-sama,” she said. “If we have even more difficult battles ahead of us, we must bring our battle formation together sooner rather than later. After all...”

After all...

“We cannot continue if we are missing you and there is a gap of time in what I am missing.”

Horizon shut her eyes.

She ignored everything outside.

*...If...*

If they set foot in here, she would get up. That was her decision.

“How strange,” said Adele with a frown.

In the depths of the night where the waterfalls and mountain stream could be heard, she raised her index finger and continued.

“If they aren’t waking up after all this yelling, it’s possible something happened.”

“Heh heh. Something!? Yes, something! What are you suggesting has happened!?”

“Well...”

Adele thought about it.

*...Huh?*

“Um?”

“What is it, Adele-dono?”

“What would you do if I jokingly said ‘murder’?”

When she asked, the 5th Special Duty Officer bent her eyes in a smile and let the silver chains dangle down from the sleeves of her *yukata*.

“That is not something to joke about.”

*That was a close one.*

*I forget the king’s guardian knight is right in front of me.*

*...I could have ended up experiencing some chain bondage!*

But why was it she could only imagine that chain bondage involving Raging Beast smashing into things and producing other violent sound effects? Probably because she had already experienced that here.

So Adele thought some more.

“Listen.”

“What is it, Adele-dono?”

“Maybe they’re doing lewd thi-...”

The 6th Special Duty Officer hit her on the back of the head. It made a nice sound. While Adele realized she was not a lost cause, the 2nd Special Duty Officer calmly spoke up.

“If they were doing that, wouldn’t all this noise outside ruin the mood?”

“Oh? But some people are put *more* in the mood when they can hear people around them. ...Um, b-but not me. There’s just someone I know who is like that. Yes!”

“Yeah...” they all agreed as the Vice Chancellor crossed her arms.

“Hmm,” she groaned. “Well, it seems unlikely anything dangerous is happening in there. After all, Asama-dono has not received a warning from the nudist’s vital readings, has she?”

Everyone turned toward Asama, who took a step back with everyone’s focus on her.

“U-umm, no. I haven’t gotten anything?”

“Heh heh. Then why didn’t you say so sooner?”

“Eh!? ...B-because that would make it look like I was monitoring him. And I couldn’t spy on him when he’s sleeping.”

“Oh? My foolish brother will visit me when I’m asleep and the reverse is fine too.”

“Well, yes, he’ll also do that at my place...”

Everyone fell silent and looked at Asama again.

“Eh?”

She was confused by all the focus she was getting. But...

“Ah.”

She frantically shook her hands back and forth.

“Y-y’know, Toori-kun has access to our shrine! Because he leaves spare clothes in my room, my dad really likes him, and he hides out there when the guards are after him! Isn’t that right, me!? Yes, it certainly is. It happens all the time.”

“It happens all the time?”

When the wolf asked that with a smile, the shrine maiden hung her head.

And Kimi slapped Asama’s shoulder.

“Anyway, Asama. This is a bit of an emergency.”

“Yes, but, um, I haven’t received a passive check warning from Hanami.”

“Heh heh. Does that mean you haven’t done an active check? Don’t you want to know if they’re all right?”

“B-but, um, I can’t tell you what that says. It would, uh, violate their privacy.”

“In other words, you did check, Didn’t you!? ‘Oh, a brain narcotic reading from Toori-kun...! And Horizon too...!’ That’s what you saw, isn’t it!? How wonderful! The brain stem is a wonderful thing! It helps stem-ulate desire! Feel free to get turned on when you see those brain narcotic readings! Let’s all get doped up on dopamine!”

*...She doesn’t let anyone get a word in edgewise...*

Adele turned her back on Asama so she would not get dragged into this.

Then the Vice Chancellor nodded as she looked toward the silent tent.

“Regardless, it would seem nothing dangerous is happening inside. Perhaps the nudist and Horizon-sama are having sex in there.”

“...Vice Chancellor. That sounds really dangerous to me.”

“Oh? Adele-dono, are you unfamiliar with sex? Sex is by no means dangerous. ...It is a very serious act that binds people together.”

Gin took Muneshige’s hand and tried to return to the clearing, but it was probably best not to interfere.

Then the 3rd Special Duty Officer raised her right hand toward Futayo.

“Which way do you mean that?”

“Judge. When I say sex, I mean sex. There is only one way you can mean it. Although if I had to specify...knowing Horizon-sama, it would be a very composed form of sex.”

“Composed...!?”

“Ga-chan! Ga-chan! Don’t say a word even if something just hit you. You might be onto a new genre here!”

Adele tried to picture it.

And the image in her head was so awful that she silently apologized to no one in particular.

She had a feeling she had dirtied herself. Yes, and she had a feeling it was more than just a “feeling”.

“Anyway,” said the 1st Special Duty Officer. “What are we going to do?”

*That’s the real question,* thought Adele.

What should they do?

The 1st Special Duty Officer’s question earned a response from Mary who was carrying a metal pot needing washing. She looked up at him from the side.

“Master Tenzou, how can we wake them without entering the tent?”

“Judge, the best way would be to yell. Like ‘H-howaaaaa!’ or something.”

Then he raised his right index finger.

“But Mitotsudaira-dono’s mother would notice any yelling since she is currently in the clearing.”

“Judge. She is being served food by Ohiroshiki and Hassan. They were saying something about how our food supply for the study camp wouldn’t last.”

*Not surprising when it’s the 5th Special Duty Officer’s mom,* thought Adele.

But the food supply was limited. It could not hold back the Reine des Garous forever.

“Then again,” began Adele. “Is there any real problem with the 5th Special Duty Officer’s mom noticing this?”

Everyone exchanged a glance and Masazumi turned to the daughter.

“Is there a problem with that, Mitotsudaira?”

“M-my mother would learn I was sharing a tent with my king!”

“Oh, is that all?” said the others as they relaxed their shoulders.

“I-Is that all?” repeated the 5th Special Duty Officer. “This is a serious issue.”

But someone else responded: the Date Vice Chancellor.

She had not changed clothes since the visit to the ruins and she faced the 5th Special Duty Officer.

“If you’re living with him, she’s going to find out eventually.”

“Yes,” added Mary with a smile. “That’s right, Lady Mitotsudaira. You would feel better if you let her know and it would help us all out. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes! That’s right!”

Everyone strongly agreed, so the 5th Special Duty Officer hung her head and averted her gaze.

*...Oh, she doesn’t trust us...*

*Mutual trust might be the biggest thing we lack,* realized Adele. But...

“What should we do?”

“Judge.” The 2nd Special Duty Officer nodded. “How about I overturn the entire tent?”

“Heh heh heh. You have guts! Our things are in there too! What if my makeup, Mitotsudaira’s yakiniku set, and Asama’s Shinto ‘playing with yourself’ set end up all jumbled together! We’d have a pretty ‘playing with yourself’ yakiniku set!”

“Then what are we supposed to do?”

*...You’re just ignoring all of that!?*

Adele was shocked. This was the confidence of someone who already had a wife. Since Asama and the 3rd Special Duty Officer were as surprised as Adele, did that mean they were relatively normal?

But Narumi struck the 2nd Special Duty Officer’s arm armor and gave him a calm look.

“Overturn the tent? Why are you so fixated on making things needlessly exciting?”

**Unturning:** “He really is hopeless.”

She posted that to a girls-only chat.

**Unturning:** “But shaking the tent isn’t a bad idea, so I’ll guide him in a more subdued direction.”

*Way to go*, thought Adele.

The Date Vice Chancellor faced the half-dragon once more.

“Kiyonari. Why do you like to give everything such an exciting solution?”

“You don’t get it, Narumi? ...Because it’s cool.”

“Oh?” She sighed. “It seems a certain half-dragon thinks construction work like overturning tents is cool.”

“Ho ho? Do you not know how cool construction equipment is!? Do you not know how cool diggers, wrecking balls, and rollers are!? Well, I suppose a snowy nation *would* make everything of snow, so it’s not your fault.”

The Date Vice Chancellor frowned at that line. It seemed to have pissed her off.

After a pause, she crossed her arms. And...

“You know,” she said. “There are far more exciting things than your proposed solution. Didn’t you know that?”

**Flat Vassal:** “Why would you provoke him, Date Vice Chancellor!?”

**Unturning:** “Sorry about that.”

**Tachibana Wife:** “Why do I get the feeling she’s only apologizing so we won’t stop her from continuing?”

**Novice:** “So it’s an apology of resolve! I can feel my blood pumping...!”

**Four Eyes:** “Um, I happen to be holding a love comedy that you wrote in middle school. It’s called Sambo Flight. Here’s a sample: ‘Sparkle. The night air was – swoosh – sliced by the silver of an indescribably beautiful blade. Excellent. Oh, could this be...?’ What even is this? Can I post the whole thing over divine transmission?”

**Novice:** “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I really liked using sound effects back then!!”

He immediately apologized.

But back in reality, the 2nd Special Duty Officer was getting worked up.

“So what are you suggesting, Narumi? Shooting the tent!?”

“Oh? You really think simply shooting it would be ‘exciting’? If you want something truly exciting, you have to move past explosions and slashes. How about some local curved crushing using a highly-concentrated gravity mass?”

“I’m not sure that’s the best way of waking someone up.”

That comment earned Adele a sidelong glance from the Date Vice Chancellor and the 2nd Special Duty Officer. And after a while...

“I think I’ll go get some dinner at the clearing,” said the half-dragon. “They’ve fixed something, haven’t they?”

“Good idea,” said the Date Vice Chancellor. “I ate my curry too early, so I’ll go with you.”

“Y-you’re treating me like I have no social awareness, aren’t you!?”

“You all are hopeless.”

Kimi opened the tent’s entrance.

“Foolish brother? Horizon?”

She readily began to look inside, so Adele and everyone else shouted at her.

“Why didn’t you just do that in the first place!?”

Suzu had sensed the inside of the tent long before the others.

She was blind, but she could search the darkness using a combination of sound, air movement, heat, *etc.* She wondered if it was wrong of her, but she had the best understanding of the situation in the tent while the others peered inside.

A blanket was laid out in the tent.

It was just the one in the center.

And everyone's things were by the walls.

*...Kimi-chan's, Toori-kun's, and Horizon's are by the entrance.*

Mitotsudaira's was by the right wall and Asama's by the left.

*...Wow.*

They had all been in there together the night before.

She wondered what that had been like, and as if to answer her...

"Ah."

Toori was sleeping in the center.

His hands were above his shoulders as if he were dangling down from something as he slept.

Were his shoulders stiff? But his fingers were spread *...Was he trying to grope her chest?*

Probably so.

But in this case, that was normal. As Kimi had said earlier, he used such things to provide a shared secret, so when he groped someone's chest, he was sharing the secret of their chest size between the two of them.

But...

*...Ah.*

When Suzu had let him grope her chest at Mikawa, had she made a mistake by reporting to everyone that they had grown? It should have been a secret between the two of them, but she had made sure everyone knew.

But she also felt like that was the only thing she could have said at the time.

*Next time. If there's a next time,* she thought.

"————"

She realized it had been the same with Mitotsudaira.

When she had lent him her chest at Mikawa, she had gotten so mad at him.

*...Was that because Toori-kun revealed the result to everyone?*

That fit the rules, but Mitotsudaira had not understood the rules back then, so her reasons would have been different.

“My king?”

She was currently peering into the tent, but what had she been thinking back then?

She had probably been surprised with how sudden it had been, but...

*...Mitotsudaira-san?*

*If Toori-kun hadn't...said anything...would you have just accepted it?*

That would be why she had said what she did.

*...She said he was...completely hopeless...didn't she?*

That did not seem like much of a response, but had there been actual meaning behind it?

*Yes. What he did there...was “completely hopeless”.*

If Mitotsudaira had known the situation, she probably would have refused. But that was just a minor discrepancy. And more importantly...

“Kimi-chan?”

“Hm? What is it, Suzu? Do you know what's happening in there?”

She did.

She kind of understood why Kimi had egged Mitotsudaira on.

*...Kimi-chan...*

*You really...love everyone...don't you?*

That girl seemed to adjust and confirm the distance between everyone so things could continue smoothly.

And now it was Suzu's turn. Since Kimi had prompted her to do so, she needed to know what was inside there.

“Wait just...a second.”

The group parted and she stepped forward to sense inside the tent.

There had been something odd in there for a while.

“Horizon...isn’t there?”

That was true. Horizon was not next to Toori.

*...Huh?*

But then she realized the truth.

Horizon was there.

But she was not at all where Suzu had expected.

In fact, she was in two places: By Toori’s head and by his feet.

“U-um?”

Suzu closed the entrance.

“Eh?”

She turned back toward the confused group and opened her mouth.

*...If I didn’t tell them, would this count as a shared secret?*

“Horizon has...her legs wrapped around...Toori-kun’s legs...I-like this?”

“That would be a figure-four leglock.”

Suzu was not sure, but she assumed that was true since Persona-kun gave a deep nod.

The others began whispering.

“How do you fall asleep like that?”

“The Chancellor probably tried something again and got hit by a counterattack.”

“I always thought Horizon was a striker, but I guess she can grapple too...”

The atmosphere seemed headed in a harsh direction.

*I need to do something,* thought Suzu before speaking to the others.

“U-um...wait.”

“What is it, Suzu-san?”

“Well, i-it’s fine...everyone.”

She smiled and explained the situation to put them at ease.

“Horizon is...holding Toori-kun in...her arms.”

Everyone let out surprised or warm breaths.

*...Good.*

She was pretty sure she had put a stop to that dangerous atmosphere, so she continued explaining what she could sense inside.

“And Horizon’s arms...both of them? Th-they’re holding Toori-kun...like this.”

She was pretty sure it was like this.

As if embracing him from behind, she had her left arm wrapped around his neck and her right arm locking the inside of his left elbow.

“L-like this?”

She tried it. And...

“———”

Everyone fell silent.

*...H-huh?*

The sudden silence caused her heart to race. Then Narumi, Mitotsudaira, and some others exchanged a glance.

“It seems Horizon really is a grappler.”

“A figure-four leglock on the bottom and a sleeper hold on the top, huh?”

“W-wait, Suzu-san? Can I ask something?”

“Wh-what is it? Asama-san?”

“Just in case it turns out you have to testify as the primary witness, remember that we’re all on your side, okay?”

“Eh? Eh?”

She was not sure what that meant, but Mitotsudaira opened the tent’s entrance.

“My king!? Are you alive!?”

Mitotsudaira viewed the scene with the light of the lamp spell charm that Asama held up.

Two people were collapsed there.

One was Horizon who was missing her arms but performing a figure-four leglock in her sleep.

Her breathing was regular, but...

“Why is she sleeping with her eyes open?”

“That’s what we’ve been wondering ever since last night...”

But beyond the perfectly-performed figure-four leglock, Mitotsudaira’s king was being held by Horizon’s arms.

As Suzu had said, Horizon’s arms had another perfect lock on his neck.

Her king’s eyes were rolled back in his head and his tongue was sticking out.

His hands were extended into the air with the fingers spread in obvious preparation to grope something. But something else mattered more at the moment.

——早く布陣を固めねばなりません。



“Tomoooo!! Oxygeeeen!”

Masazumi’s voice reached them from the distance.

“Can you people not even sleep normally!?”

Mitotsudaira had to agree.

—**We must bring our battle formation together sooner rather than later.**

Study

## ●ここ最近の極東における歴史の流れなど●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! ちょっと武蔵関連で歴史の流れがどーなってるのかと、今後どーなっていくのかとか、ちょっと教えてくんね!」



「フフフ歴弟、先日の神流川の戦いや第一次上田合戦とか、他国の歴史再現が交差したうえに、毛利までやってきちゃって、何が何だか解らなくなってるわね? じゃあ賢い姉が、この後も含めて関東方面中心にちょっとまとめて見るわ!」内が歴史再現の結果ね?」

### 【既に終了したもの】

・文禄の役(羽柴vs朝鮮):大陸侵攻を講じた羽柴による朝鮮侵攻。



「江戸、里見が占領された」

・神流川の戦い(北条vsP.A.Oda):北条が、織田によって関東の管理を任されていた滝川・一益を、信長の暗殺を契機に攻めて関東から追い出す戦い。



「有明上にて北条の意思を汲み、武蔵が滝川の白鷺城を撃沈」

・第一次上田合戦(真田vs松平):真田が、松平によって領地の付け替えをされそうになり、反抗。真田が勝利する。



「上田の遺跡にて、武蔵勢は真田の天竜を撃破するも、遺跡の崩落により撤退」

### 【これからの北条戦で起きるもの】

・天正壬午の乱(北条vs松平): 信長の死後、滝川達がいなくなって空いた関東を奪い合う戦い。松平の勝利で講和。

・小田原征伐(北条vs羽柴): 惣無事令違反を犯した北条への征伐。水攻めで北条の敗北。

・備中高松城の戦い(毛利vs羽柴): 中国地方平定を狙う羽柴と毛利の決着戦。水攻めで毛利の敗北。

・蟹江城の戦い(羽柴vs松平): 小牧長久手の戦いの一部で、滝川による籠城戦と、その敗北。



「——ってところね。全部、信長の暗殺以後のものだから、私達は前回までの戦いで結構頑張ったわけ。これらの後、第二次上田合戦や、慶長の役、関ヶ原があるけど、それはここでは割愛ね?」



「つーかこんなにイベントフラグ、何処で立ったんだ……」

## The Recent Course of Far Eastern History

Toori: Sis! Sis! Could you tell me what the Musashi-related history's been doing lately and what's gonna happen from now on!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. History brother, with the Battle of Kanagawa and the First Siege of Ueda, we have been involved in the history recreations of other nations recently. And now Mouri is here, so you must be really confused. Well, your wise sister will give you a look at the Kantou-centric events, including the ones coming up. The parts in quotes are the result of the history recreation, okay?

### Already Completed:

- Bunroku Campaign (Hashiba vs. Korea): Hashiba's Korean invasion as a starting point to invade the continent. ➡ "Edo and Satomi were conquered."
- Battle of Kanagawa (Houjou vs. P.A. Oda): Houjou takes advantage of Nogunaga's assassination to drive out Takigawa Ichimasu who Oda left in charge of Kantou. ➡ "After picking up on Houjou's intent at the Ariake, Musashi sank Takigawa's Shirasagi Castle."
- First Siege of Ueda (Sanada vs. Matsudaira): Matsudaira prepares to replace Sanada's territory, so Sanada resists. Sanada wins. ➡ "At the Ueda ruins, Musashi defeated the Sanada Celestial Dragons and had to retreat when the ruins collapsed."

### To Be Completed During the Houjou Battle:

- Tensho Jingo Conflict (Houjou vs. Matsudaira): After Nobunaga's death and with Takigawa gone, the Kantou forces fight for supremacy. Matsudaira wins and reconciles with Houjou.
- Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle (Mouri vs. Hashiba): The final showdown between Mouri and Hashiba, who is attempting to subjugate the Chugoku region. Mouri loses after being flooded.
- Siege of Kanie Castle (Hashiba vs. Matsudaira): A portion of the Battle of Komaki Nagakute. Takigawa attempts a siege and is defeated.

Kimi: That's about it. They all happen after Nobunaga's assassination, so we did a pretty good job with all the previous battles. After this, we also have the Second Siege of Ueda, the Keichou Campaign, and Sekigahara, but I'll omit those here.

Toori: When did we raise all these event flags...?

# Chapter 1: Challenger of a Homesick Peak

# 第一章

## 『望郷峰の挑戦者』



夜の空が遠くを見せる  
暗い峠や峰の向こう  
そう見えるのは思い違いか  
配点（先行き）

*When the night sky appears so distant  
Beyond the dark mountain passes and ridges  
Is that appearance a misunderstanding?*

### **Point Allocation (The Future)**

Takigawa was in the winds of the night sky.

Just a few hours earlier, she had been picked up by Houjou and invited to join them while wearing only the clothes on her back, but...

*...Should I call this a pain? Or...*

"No, I guess I should say there's still something I can do."

She called out from a new wooden deck.

She stood atop the Ootaki Castle, a warship belonging to Houjou.

A girl wearing a white Indian-style summer uniform stood 12 meters away on her right.

That was Houjou Ujinao. She had a ninja Mouse at her feet and she was not looking in Takigawa's direction.

But Takigawa called out to her regardless.

"Hey, Houjou, what is the meaning of this?"

"It has many meanings. Including an intent to make use of you," she said. "But for us, it is simply a desire to end a number of troublesome things all at once."

"...Shaja."

Takigawa nodded. She had been monitoring Houjou, so they probably had some choice words for her.

"You said you were unifying the Houjou, Mouri, and Hashiba battlefields, didn't you? Does that mean-...?"

"We have no intention of simply forming an alliance. Each of our nations has a different standpoint. Although Mouri will equalize the battlefields, so I would like to join forces with them wherever possible." Houjou was facing forward, as

if viewing the deep forest spread out below. "Houjou will be destroyed here. And, Takigawa-sama, the Testament also describes a loss for you as part of Hashiba's forces. Mouri too will lose. This is a losing battle for all of us."

However...

"Mouri alone will continue on with Matsudaira afterwards."

"So we should join Mouri?"

"No." Houjou shook her head. "We should each do what we think will give us an advantage. I will give you a decent fighting force, but not because I wish to join forces with you or Hashiba. ...I am giving you the fighting force needed to establish you as part of Hashiba's forces."

Takigawa knew what Ujinao was trying to say.

"Are you telling me to lose the Battle of Kanie Castle to fulfill my history recreation?"

"We would be in trouble if you did not. After all..."

Takigawa completed Ujinao's sentence for her.

"After all," she repeated. "You need the Battle of Komaki Nagakute to hinder Musashi."

"I see," said Takigawa.

Her defeat was a part of the Battle of Komaki Nagakute, which was a battle between Hashiba and Matsudaira. Strategically, it would be Matsudaira's victory, but it was also necessary for Hashiba's retirement.

Hashiba would drag out and delay that battle in order to extend her life.

"And that's why pro-Matsudaira Houjou wants to start a portion of Komaki Nagakute, huh? You're gonna make me cry." Takigawa smiled bitterly. "So while your nation is collapsing, you want to help out the nation that will later take control of it? Not bad. You're a surprisingly dedicated person."

"Hee hee. ...You can come out and call it clumsy if you like. And you too are clumsy as you take part from the opposite position."

"Could you maybe call it faithful instead?"

*I'm not getting any support here, am I?* thought Takigawa as she sat down. She also glanced over at Ujinao.

"So are you trying to keep a safe distance from me, or what?"

"Ujinao-sama! This woman is dangerous!"

Her Mouse spread out her limbs in a cautious pose.

*...Oh, how brave.*

Of course, from a military standpoint, Houjou had plenty of strength as a nation. This was the Mouse assigned to their leader. And since she had a combat job, she would be more than just your average Mouse.

But Ujinao spoke up with a bitter smile.

"It's fine, Kotarou. There is no need to reveal everything we can do. More importantly, get something to drink for Takigawa-sama there."

"Eh!? You're giving her some Sujakta nectar!?"

"I was expecting some kind of alcohol, not whatever that is."

At any rate, the ninja Mouse named Kotarou took off running across the deck. *She's pretty fast*, thought Takigawa before facing forward again.

It initially seemed like you could not see anything in that dark forest, but there were some waves of darkness formed by the moonlight.

There were also occasional lights of people's homes. Those were either small villages or forest workers who lived in the mountains.

"Harmonic Territories like that are rare in this area. Do those people make a living from what they can produce there?"

"Qing and we benefit from that as much as Sanada does. Although it is not enough to support a definite industry."

Takigawa realized Ujinao was facing a distant light.

*...That would be Sanada, where Musashi is.*

The giant ship's silhouette in the sky acted as a landmark. It was so large it

could be mistaken for a cloud at first.

That was what she had fought. And...

"I'm thankful."

She had been given another chance to fight it.

This battle would benefit Musashi, just as Houjou hoped, but it would also benefit Hashiba.

Her loss would allow Musashi to apply pressure to Hashiba, but it also allowed Hashiba to dispose of a loss during an important battle.

In a way, the advantage for one side canceled out the advantage for the other.

But that was fine.

At the very least, it would cause no damage or rush things for the future.

The forces she would lose in this battle would be given to her by Houjou. She really should have retired immediately, but Takigawa decided to trust that this was the better option. So...

"Will you have things ready for me tomorrow?"

"That is my intent. As for the Sanada group..."

They had withdrawn inside the ship to treat their wounds and damage.

*...They probably have their own thoughts on the matter.*

She had a general idea what those were.

"What matters for Sanada is the Osaka Campaign. You'll need to understand the various obstacles to that, the interference of the other clans, and the Second Siege of Ueda that occurs during Sekigahara."

They had plenty of military might, so...

"To get them to listen, you need a connection to the Testament Union. I'm connected to Hashiba, but what will you do about that?"

"We are closer to Mouri, so I will grant you the Sanada forces."

Ujinao sat on the deck as she said that.

She seemed to be taking a casual position, but she ended up cross-legged. However, she must have had excellent balance because her back remained straight. It almost looked like she was using her own hips as a chair.

And Takigawa spoke to that girl who continued facing Sanada land.

"I more or less know what you're after here. Including that you're using us as an excuse."

"Then you understand the rest too, don't you?"

"Yes," confirmed Takigawa. "The battle coming the day after tomorrow won't be fought by a combined force of Houjou, Mouri, and Hashiba. You aren't just using us as bait; you're also using *yourselves* as bait to prepare an even greater enemy and reward for Musashi."

"So you really do understand."

But just as Ujinao said that...

"———"

Starting from her seated position, Takigawa leaped 7 meters to the left and away from Ujinao.

...?

Takigawa made an evasive leap.

She had not just imagined that. Some cold air had passed behind her.

It was probably a blade.

The thick weapon had appeared out of thin air and tried to take off her head.

Or so she thought. However...

"Kotarou."

"Oh, yes. I have her drink!"

Ujinao's Mouse was in the spot Takigawa had just vacated.

The tiny girl carried a bisque container on the tray she held overhead.

And she gave Takigawa a sidelong glance.

"I will leave this here."

"...Kotarou," said Ujinao. "She is a guest. She was invited here so that we could build a better future. Please do not harass her. If you do..."

She paused.

"I *will* stop you."

Takigawa gave a mental reaction to those words.

She laughed.

*...Ha ha!*

The danger she had briefly sensed had been real, not just her imagination. But it had not been targeting her. In fact, it had been Ujinao's warning to the Mouse in order to protect her.

*In that case*, thought Takigawa. She had estimated their distance at 12 meters before.

*...I can't jump that far!*

While seated, she could jump 7 meters. While standing, 10.

Ujinao had seen through that. And since she made no attempt to move even now...

"Is this 20 meter distance within your attack range too?"

"Hee hee..."

Ujinao laughed quietly.

She lowered her head so the shadows of the night hid her expression.

But her white clothing swayed in the moonlight and she spoke.

"...I really am conceited, aren't I?"

That voice was as well-tuned as a musical instrument and Takigawa sucked in a breath when she heard it. And...

*...Yes.*

Takigawa understood both hers and Houjou's situations.

Houjou would support her, but they would do no more and no less. If she became a hindrance, they would even cut her down. However...

*...They are also telling me to be the same.*

She could only view it as a threat that her athletic ability had been so thoroughly assessed. She did not know how it had been done, but it must have been measured in some way since she had boarded this ship.

But since Ujinao used that result to keep her distance...

"Are you saying I am free to make an attack at any time?"

"This is the age of the warring states," quietly said Ujinao. She placed a hand on her neck and raised her head to expose her shut eyes and slender face to the moonlight. "Even my clan has been experiencing some quiet infighting against my uncle Ujiteru."

"So that you're prepared whenever another clan decides to attack?"

*That's quite something,* thought Takigawa.

*...Is she a monster?*

The Chancellors and Vice Chancellors of every nation tended to push the limits. She knew people like that and had interacted with them. The ones like Shiba were hardly complex, but most of them were.

Houjou was a smaller nation than Hashiba, but a Chancellor was still a Chancellor.

That girl was a monster.

With that in mind, Takigawa stood up.

"I'll take that drink."

There was no fear in her legs as she approached the tray.

She was aware just how bold she was being.

"The loser shall play her part by losing. For the sake of the war."

She took the bowl from the tray and raised it toward the moons.

She sipped at the contents and found a sour flavor and the sticky sweetness of peaches.

"That's hard to get down. Way too sweet."

"Did you know?"

"Know what?"

"If sweetness crosses a certain line, it apparently becomes bitter." Ujinao smiled bitterly. "We are still sweet. ...So we need to reach that troublesome threshold."

"Mouri is here, are they? This is looking like trouble, 'Musashi'-san."

From the forest clearing in front of a bungalow, a voice looked up to the ship silhouettes in the night sky.

Wooden tables were lined up at one end of the clearing and someone there had set up a self-serve sake set.

"Sakai-sama, how is this trouble? You are taking part in our Musashi Ariadust Academy's official study camp, so there is no need to hide or to attack, is there? Over."

"Well, that is true."

"More importantly, Sakai-sama, how is the food delivered via bamboo spear bomber? Over."

"Oh, right," said Sakai as he used chopsticks to tear off some cooked flounder meat.

He moved just his eyes to look at "Musashi" displayed in the sign frame next to his face.

"I thought the contents would have been destroyed by the impact, but they weren't shaken at all."

"Judge. I apologize for not living up to your expectations. That device is a prototype meant for the emergency drop off of important items or people, so the inside is fixed in place via gravitational control. Did the fish-...?"

"Yes, the mirin added the perfect touch and it goes well with the sake."

"I was asking if it had fallen apart after cooking. Over."

"Oh, sorry. ...It broke a bit when transferring it over to the plate. I was trying to make sure the ginger didn't fall off, you see. I just can't do it the way you can, 'Musashi'-san."

"The next time we use this method, I will make sure to transfer it over to a plate before sending it. Over."

"Musashi" lowered her head slightly and then looked to the right on the sign frame.

Several silhouettes were visible in the western sky, the same direction all of the Musashi's bows were facing.

Those ships were gently traveling south with their lights on.

"So that's the combined force of Mouri, Hexagone Française, Sanada, and Oda headed to Houjou land."

"The central ship is the Mouri flagship: the Pension Versailles. It is 120 meters longer than it was when we saw it at IZUMO. Over."

"They flew here from Mouri in just a day or two. That's probably to both increase their speed and allow the wind to flow more silently around them. Mouri is close to IZUMO, but they caused enough trouble in the battle against Amago to distance IZUMO from them, so their aerial ship tech is at the same level as other nations."

"Judge." "Musashi" gave a bow of understanding. "Have you concluded what Mouri's intentions are here? Over."

"That's a good question."

Sakai lightly shook the sake bottle in his right hand.

It was empty.

He spun it around in his fingers just once, set it down on the table, and turned around.

Something was stabbed into the ground behind him: a giant bamboo spear

with a panel opened on the side. That bamboo spear launcher was pierced deep into the ground, but it still towered about 7 meters up.

"Won't it be a nuisance if we keep firing these things?"

"The hardening agent used as the bamboo spear launcher's natural material transforms into a separating agent when it decays. In two weeks, that will be no more than a bundle of straw, so please carry back the containers you find inside. Over."

"Then I'll have to take it all out, won't I?"

Sakai reached into the launcher and pulled out a sunken metal sake bottle along with the insulated container it sat inside.

In the western sky overhead, another new aerial ship was headed south.

"...This sure is complicated."

"Mouri's situation, you mean? Over."

"Judge," he said while placing the container and his elbow on the table.

He opened his mouth as he viewed the Musashi in the eastern sky and the Mouri and Houjou ships in front of it. He raised his eyebrows and the corners of his mouth.

"Does this mean Mouri...no, Hexagone Française is being manipulated by Masazumi-kun's decisions?"

"Hexagone Française is...by Masazumi-sama's decisions? Over."

"Yes." Sakai tasted the flame-cooked vegetables on his square plate. "The green pepper is good."

"As an ingredient or how well cooked it is? Over."

"How well cooked it is. I like how the stem is slightly burned."

"Thank you very much. ...Now, about Masazumi-sama. Over."

"Do you know why Mouri and the others are taking so long to pass by in front of the Musashi?"

"Well," said "Musashi" as she looked right on the sign frame to view the western sky again.

But she soon faced forward to look northwest.

The Mouri ships were removing their stealth and appearing in the northwestern night sky one at a time. The impressive forms and rumblings that appeared were primarily transport ships instead of warships, but...

"They are displaying a lot of warning lights and signals from their ships. And both the leading Houjou ships and the following Hexagone Française ships are traveling along the provisional border. Over."

"Musashi" sent a sign frame to Sakai.

It was a map of the Mouri fleet on the provisional border.

"This is the shortest route from the northwest to Houjou. The southwest is controlled by P.A. Oda's Takigawa. The northeast is Sanada land, where we are. The Mouri fleet is currently traveling northwest to southeast along the provisional border that passes between those. ...However, Takigawa's territory was provisionally removed after the Battle of Kanagawa and the right to compete for it has been given to Houjou and Matsudaira as part of the history recreation. Over."

"It's only provisionally contested land, but they've still chosen to diligently travel along the provisional border. That acts as an example and carries a certain meaning. ...'Musashi'-san, as a sailor, do you know what that is?"

"Judge." "Musashi" nodded. "Mouri's forces are in a hurry. Over."

"Musashi" stood at an elevated place.

She was atop the bridge-shaped ship's bridge of Musashino, the 1st center ship. She spoke with Sakai's sign frame next to her face.

"I have determined the Mouri fleet used an inland route over the mountains while in stealth mode. As long as they restricted their altitude, the many obstacles would make it difficult to search them out even if they were detected. And on the provisional border, I estimate that most nations would overlook it in

order to avoid conflict with the neighboring nation. ...Also, the inland route allows them to safely enter Kantou without running across the Azuchi on its sea route. Over."

"Musashi" watched another transport ship appear and raised her right hand.

That hand reached toward a sign frame displaying Mouri's predicted route. It showed Mouri passing from northern M.H.R.R., through southern P.A. Oda, and across Mikawa.

But there was one thing of note about the route she drew.

"I believe their route would have been very similar to the one we used during the Battle of Mikatagahara. Over."

"Yes, since M.H.R.R.'s Hashiba forces have invaded Mouri, Mouri's fleet probably passed through behind them with help from the northern Protestants. As for southern P.A. Oda, the Kii Peninsula has been nearly abandoned with Lord Matsunaga gone, so it would be perfect to pass through," said Sakai. "But when you get down to it, the Mouri fleet is in a hurry, just like you said. After all, while they might be using the provisional borderline and while they are slowly moving their ships one at a time, that's just proof that they haven't negotiated things out with the nations bordering their route. They're hoping to not be noticed, to not provoke anyone if they are, and to follow all the proper passage rules in case anything happens. ...That means a nation as large as Mouri came all the way to Kantou without doing any real negotiations first."

"Why? Over." asked "Musashi". "Why would a powerful nation like Hexagone Française split their forces in two and hold the history recreation of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle and the Invasion of Mouri while they are being attacked?"

"That is what Masazumi-kun is having a meeting about right now."

On his sign frame, Sakai shifted his gaze. His eyes had been moving between the sky, the table, and the bamboo spear launcher behind him, but now they turned toward the clearing.

*...Who all is there?*

"Musashi" looked in that direction too, but she could not see.

However, she did have the 3D model information of Sanada territory sent back by Suzu.

Sakai was in a forest clearing. It was normally used for orientation.

The edge of the forest on the back end of the clearing was set up to hold an open-air meeting.

Simple chairs cut from logs were lined up and there was an elevated speaker's platform surrounded by stones.

According to her measurements, Sakai's gaze was on that meeting platform.

So who was it gesturing and giving an explanation from that platform?

"Now, Masazumi-kun. Today's Sanada battle, the 1st Siege of Ueda, has set the world in motion, but what will you do to set a path for our group?"

"Okay, let's discuss this in stages."

Masazumi clapped her hands once before speaking.

*...I need to pull myself together.*

She was in a forest clearing near their camp.

The bungalow for the teachers and some of the students was to the west of the clearing. Normal guests would use that bungalow or pitch tents in the clearing.

They had pitched their tents by the mountain stream because the study camp included some camping-related training. The other classes had also set up camps in the mountain and forest.

Since the shared water source and firewood pile were here, students from the other classes could occasionally be seen arriving or leaving.

Even now, Class Pine's member of the Representative Committee was greeting Sakai at his table across the clearing. They were carrying a water bucket with used fireworks soaking in it, so their class's orientation must have been complete.

Masazumi had something else to do while that was going on. She faced the

group gathered at the campfire and tables.

"First, let's review the current situation."

She had to solidify their mental footing. So...

"Look to the sky. As you should quickly notice, Mouri's fleet is periodically leaving stealth mode and heading to Houjou. And Mouri has sent us an emissary: the Reine des Garous acting as Masuda Motonaga."

The Reine des Garous sat on a log chair beyond the campfire.

This was Masazumi's first time seeing her up close. Masazumi had not seen her at all since IZUMO, but when she sat there in a yukata, she seemed much more like an incarnation of volume than she had at a distance.

*...That's incredible.*

Masazumi continued speaking while she thought that.

"Listen. We need to keep the current situation in mind as we think about Houjou's Siege of Odawara and the Invasion of Mouri that will be held simultaneously starting two days from now."

And to do that...

"For the first half of this meeting, we need to review the current situation. That will also help us reach a consensus with Mouri via the Reine des Garous."

## **Chapter 2: Children Surrounding a Fire**

## 第二章

### 『火囲いの子供達』



送り狼はどこまで送る  
一つ二つの尾根の先  
それは子供が  
泣かぬ道  
配点（獲物）

*How far will the wolf see you off?*

*The path beyond*

*A mountain ridge or two*

*Is one where children do not cry*

### **Point Allocation (Prey)**

With everyone's eyes on her, Masazumi started by raising her right hand.

"Listen."

The campfire provided heat to the front of her body.

Behind her, she felt the chill of a surface night, which reminded her of old times.

She let that temperature difference calm her as she spoke.

"I think we absolutely should take part in Houjou's Siege of Odawara and the Invasion of Mouri. That is our overall policy at the moment. Keep that in mind."

"In other words," said Horizon while raising her right hand. "You want war."

*...This isn't about what I want!*

But Masazumi chose to hold her tongue on that. Instead, she provided a correction.

"Houjou says they want war and Mouri is saying the same. Yes. Th-that means we have no other choice. Going to war here is perfectly normal. Right? Isn't it?"

"Don't force yourself!"

When everyone said that, Masazumi mentally averted her gaze. This was truly regrettable.

But then she faced them all from the platform once more.

"Anyway. Jokes aside, there is a good reason to consider war with those two nations. So in addition to the overall policy I just mentioned and to our basic understanding of the situation, I would like to decide on a new policy."

She took a breath and placed her hands on her hips.

She looked to everyone with something she needed to tell them all.

It could be seen as the foundation of the previous overall policy.

*...Our next policy will be a new one that allows us to handle this more realistically.*

She started with some basic information they would need to know.

"Listen." She pointed her thumb toward the southern sky. "Mouri and everyone else is gathering at Odawara right now."

She added a "but" while facing one spot among them all: the Reine des Garous.

She sat diagonally back from Mitotsudaira who had taken up her position next to the idiot and Horizon. She was wearing a yukata after taking a bath and she wore the towel like a stole to keep her shoulders warm, but...

*...She will act as our contact point for Mouri and Houjou.*

Masazumi ignored Mitotsudaira who had been hanging her head this entire time.

"When you get down to it, we have no reason to fight this battle against Houjou and Mouri as a 'war'."

"Eh? ...We have no reason to fight this war? What does that mean?"

Masazumi heard a voice.

It was Naruze's. She wore a track suit and raised her right hand.

"Do you love war so much that you're willing to start them for no reason at all?"

"That's not what I meant! And don't just assume I'm on the pro-war side!"

"Indeed," said Futayo who wore a track suit on the front row. She shook her ponytail which was tied back with string and slowly turned to face Naruze.

"Listen, Naruze-dono. ...Not even Masazumi likes meaningless war. In other

words," she said. "Masazumi is feeling heartbroken that she can find no meaning in the war that is about to start. So logically, we can say that it is only meaningful wars that she loves. ...And wars are generally fought for a reason, so we can also say that she loves and supports most wars. Therefore, we can say that she is pro-war."

Futayo paused. After a while, she placed a hand on her forehead and began sweating profusely.

"Where did I go wrong in my logic...?"

"Right from the beginning!"

Futayo gestured for everyone to calm down and Masazumi sighed and opened a sign frame while she watched it all play out.

...Umm.

"Can we get back on topic? How far did I get? Look, I have Tsukinowa as my sign frame wallpaper. Isn't he cute?"

"V-Vice President!" said Adele. "You need to get back on topic, too!"

Next to Adele, track-suit-wearing Mukai tilted her head.

"You said...we have no reason...to fight a war...against Houjou and...Mouri."

**Gold Mar:** "Bell-rin, that's incredible...!"

**Marube-ya:** "Yeah, I didn't expect any assistance here!"

**Unturning:** "Oh? I thought this class preferred to keep the gags going a little longer than that."

**Uqui:** "Narumi, it is the fact that she did not that is so impressive. That was some expert-level *wabi-sabi*."

Masazumi wanted to say something, but there was something else she had to explain here.

She used the sign frame to display footage of the recent battles.

"Musashi's primary objective at the moment is to apply pressure on Hashiba. Do you know why that is?"

"To end Hashiba's history recreation for the safety of Europe. ...Isn't that right?"

That answer came from Crossunite who sat next to Mary on a wooden bench. Mary must have been exhausted because she was leaning against him, nearly embracing his arm, and nodding off.

However, even the eyes on his hat remained composed.

"Hashiba is a faction of P.A. Oda — nwoh! — and they have joined with M.H.R.R. — ohhhh! — while they attempt to sweep across Europe — more more! — so Europe probably wants — hwoh! — to suppress Hashiba and set things up — boobs! — for a Europe-only Peace of W-W-Westphalia."

"Crossunite, we don't need a running commentary on how Mary is leaning on you."

That said, what he had said was correct.

"At Magdeburg, we held a meeting with the European powers and agreed to hasten Hashiba's history recreation as well as Nobunaga's which leads into Hashiba's. That way we can get Europe's cooperation at Westphalia."



The Reine des Garous narrowed her eyes and laughed softly. She lifted her chair and slowly moved from behind Mitotsudaira to behind the idiot. She then placed her chin on the idiot's head while ignoring the way Mitotsudaira cautiously angled her body.

"You have some skilled people working for you."

"Wow, those are big... I, uh, mean, they're not so much skilled as running the whole show without me."

"Very true," agreed Horizon next to him. She wrinkled her brow while blatantly touching the Reine des Garous's hair and chest. "Now this is very different from Mitotsudaira-sama... Anyway, I had only just begun participating in politics at the time, but I believe that was when we were wondering what to do about our respective positions during an away game."

"D-did you just gloss over some kind of weird comment with that 'anyway'!?"

"Now, now, Nate. Are you at that awkward age where you want to discuss your failings?"

The Reine des Garous scooted her chair over behind Horizon and lightly embraced her from behind.

"You are correct about that. Both Mikawa and England were more or less on your side and understood you. It was only at Magdeburg that you really started leaving your comfort zone. That can't have been easy."

"These really are big...! It is true I had only just started to participate back then, so we were unable to handle Guericke-sama very well and caused him a fair amount of trouble."

Masazumi had been there for that, but she saw Naruze, who had also been there, raise her right hand.

"What kind of trouble was that again?"

"Judge," said Horizon regarding that hemisphere sucker. "We should have finished things in a single round, not three."

"Hey, Guericke."

The smell of ink filled the air as factory workers faced the printing presses and kept working late into the night. In the large underground printing office's entrance, Tomoe Gozen asked Guericke a question.

She held a paste-up for a mini-version of the Ninety-five Theses.

"I know you had the printing office expanded during Magdeburg's great remodeling, but there's one thing I keep meaning to ask you about the general-audience printing menu. Why did you get rid of the old partial-submission option, like where you could submit your manuscript in three parts?"

"Testament, I have decided that we must finish all things in one go."

"I doubt needlessly pressuring yourself like that is going to end well."

"Not to worry." Guericke stared off into the distance while checking over a submitted manuscript on a *lernen figur*. "I prefer at least three censorship bars, not just one. So I am striking the right balance here."

"Anyway, what happened to your promise with Anne and the others?"

The Reine des Garous asked that of their Vice President.

*...I would really like to know.*

During the Sack of Magdeburg, she had only met her daughter, her daughter's king, a Schwarz Hexen girl, the English princess, and...um, a ninja. She had also encountered their Vice Chancellor at IZUMO, but that was all the contact she had had with them.

With the exception of their king's sister, this was her first time meeting the Vice President and all the others. They would of course have seen her from a distance and she recognized a lot of the scents she had picked up on back then.

They had once been her enemy, even if only temporarily.

It was an interesting and fickle connection that felt like it could turn any which way from a single reaction. And even if it did turn in the wrong direction, she had enough strength to handle it. Her one concern was growing so attached to someone that her strength no longer mattered, but her husband had already filled that role and she felt that king should be given that role for her daughter.

They were a single force, just like the Reine des Garous and Hexagone Française.

So she asked a question of the representative of that group that, just like her own group, had power and was trying to change the world in some way.

"What has become of your promise to do something about Hashiba and Nobunaga? ...That is what I would like to hear."

Masazumi listened to the Reine des Garou speak.

"Heh heh. What has become of the promise you made with Anne at Magdeburg?"

She did not immediately reply.

She thought about how they had fought and spoken in the eastern lands since Magdeburg and how Hexagone Française had fought in the western lands.

And on top of that, she knew that the Reine des Garous's question was a test.

The woman was asking what they would do about the world after everything they had experienced since Magdeburg.

*...That's probably part of the reason why she's here.*

Mouri had to be curious about their plans.

Mouri was currently working with Houjou to complete the Invasion of Mouri, but they had chosen Musashi as an opponent over Hashiba.

Why was unclear.

Optimistically, it could mean Mouri and Hexagone Française were more focused on them than Hashiba and wanted to work with them in constructing a post-Hashiba world.

Pessimistically, it could mean Mouri and Hexagone Française were more concerned about them than Hashiba and wanted to work with Houjou to weaken them.

Masazumi wanted to stay optimistic, but there was one major concern.

Mouri and Houjou had Sanada and P.A. Oda's Takigawa with them.

It was best to assume they were enemies.

*...But...*

Masazumi breathed in and was aware everyone's focus was on her.

"So you want to know what we have been doing since Magdeburg, do you?"

In other words, after they had met and parted with Anne, Hexagone Française's previous Chancellor.

The Reine des Garous was Hexagone Française's representative, so they had to tell her this.

They had to give Hexagone Française the information they needed to decide whether to work together with or turn against them in the future.

They had to demonstrate their worth.

That result could lead to a mere show of cooperation leading into a battle to exterminate them, but...

"———"

Masazumi faced forward and saw the idiot stick a sign frame over his crotch so that the others could not see.

It said, "If you can read this, you're a perv."

*...Die...!*

After smiling and pointing her right thumb down, she took a breath.

Then she nodded toward the Reine des Garous and swept her gaze across all the others.

"Are you listening?"

"Currently," said Masazumi as she indicated the past combat footage displayed on her sign frame. "We have almost entirely fulfilled our promise with the European powers at Magdeburg. No, I should say we already fulfilled it with the local battle against Houjou earlier."

Because...

"That Houjou battle, the Battle of Kanagawa, occurs after Nobunaga's assassination according to the Testament. It was fought to drive Takigawa Ichimasu out of Kantou after she learned of the assassination, so holding that recreation means we have forced their hand on the history recreation of that assassination. ...And the following 1st Siege of Ueda is the same. That too occurs after Nobunaga's assassination and the 2nd Siege of Ueda after that occurs during Sekigahara."

Do you understand?

"Currently, there are no major history recreations in Kantou from before Nobunaga's assassination and we have taken two major steps forward with battles that occur after it.

"With the Battle of Kanagawa, we have moved to the age after Nobunaga's assassination.

"With the 1st Siege of Ueda, we have brought things within a step of Sekigahara.

"That means we have acted as representatives of Kantou to apply pressure on Nobunaga."

"Judge," agreed Mitotsudaira.

The Battle of Kanagawa they had fought against Houjou and P.A. Oda had been a turning point both politically and for their standpoint.

*...We started off fighting Houjou but we became Houjou partway through...*

And in the 1st Siege of Ueda, they had arrived at the ruins and fought the Celestial Dragons who represented Sanada.

"That is very true," said the 1st Special Duty Officer. He used his left arm to support Mary as she dozed off. "In those two battles...Asama-dono fired an overexcited blast that exposed the Shirasagi Castle and Mitotsudaira-dono struck it twice with overexcited hammer blows. And since she did the same to the Celestial Dragon, we have essentially confirmed some post-Nobunaga

history recreations in Kantou."

"I-I was not overexcited! I made sure to calm myself before firing so I could hit. So I wasn't overexcited. Not at allll."

"Th-that's right! I was only doing that because our strategy demanded it, so I wasn't overexcited. Besides, the attack I made in front of my king was a stake, not a hammer!"

"A stake!? Nate, you drove a stake into your king!?"

*...Why does she have to latch onto the weirdest things!?*

Should she stop her?

No, trying to stop her would only start a serious battle and cause a fair bit of damage before the battle two days from now even began. Besides, why was her mother wiggling back and forth in her pajamas with her hands on her cheeks?

"Nate! You've overthrown him, haven't you!?"

"Wait," said Horizon. She then turned toward Mitotsudaira's mother and buried her face in the woman's chest. "Foh fuh foor faying fih foo fuh fah foh fuh fuh."

"Horizon! You don't need to force yourself to speak to get your point across!"

"My apologies." Horizon removed her face from the mother's chest before continuing. "I doubt that even Mitotsudaira-sama would drive a stake into Toori-sama just because she was overexcited."

"Yes, I suppose you're right..."

Mitotsudaira was more shocked that her mother had backed down than by what Horizon had said.

*...Does this mean Horizon is the strongest!?*

That possibility came to mind, but she had a feeling her mother was always going to act like that to her.

*...Oh, she's teasing me, isn't she?*

After a bit over 17 years of life, she finally caught on.

Asama had been watching the exchange while trying to pretend she was not involved, but was there some way of dragging her into it?

**Silver Wolf:** "Tomo! Tomo!"

<**Warning: Asama-sama is currently in lockdown mode. Please wait and try calling her again later!: Confirm**> *Anything goes with Shinto, doesn't it?* she thought, but it seemed Asama had made a successfully escape this time.

But while Mitotsudaira's mother smiled, Horizon looked to Masazumi.

"Masazumi-sama, let us end this discussion of the Siege of Odawara by saying that Mitotsudaira-sama is prepared to drive a stake into Toori-sama."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?"

"That is not a good at all."

Mitotsudaira felt the need to say that with a smile, but that led her mother to place her hands on her mysteriously flushed cheeks.

"Then let's discuss this at our leisure later on, Nate. Oh, and everyone else can join us too."

...Kh...!

She wanted to say something, but doing so would only cause more damage. Everyone was probably somewhat overexcited with someone as interesting as her mother here. Naruze was looking at her mother and sketching something, but the way she kept glancing to her and her king as well meant she needed to inspect that later.

**Mal-Ga:** "Oh, c'mon. What are you so worried about? ...It's just some mother-daughter time with a king thrown into the mix."

**Silver Wolf:** "That's exactly what I was worried about!!"

**Gold Mar:** "See, Ga-chan? You rushed this one too much. Let's think it over and give it a twist."

That also sounded dangerous, but at least she knew an inspection was definitely in order.

But there was one other thing she was curious about.

*...My king?*

She glanced his way to see what he thought about this situation.

He and Horizon were both giving her a thumbs up.

She had no idea what that meant, but she was fairly certain she did not want to know.

*...Umm...*

While her confused heart brought on a dull sweat, a sign frame appeared next to her face. Kimi had sent a message to only her and Asama.

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh. You'll — have — to — wait."

*...Wh-what does that mean!?*

She doubted she would get an answer if she asked. Kimi's method was to make an invitation but only tell them to "go for it" if they tried to get a proper explanation.

Who was it with the teaching that said those who did no work would be given no sustenance?

Then Masazumi spoke up as if announcing the end of a break.

"The rest of you can debate over whether it was a stake or a hammer, but it is true that those two battles have fulfilled our obligation to the European powers. Also..."

She jerked her chin toward the northern sky.

She looked up at the night sky where dragons could still be seen flying.

"In the north, we were promised the cooperation of Date, Mogami, and Sviet Rus and we gained mutual approval of our path leading beyond Nobunaga's assassination. ...That means our battle with Sanada today gathered most everything we need to get from Nobunaga's assassination to Sekigahara and to the state of the Far East after that."

So...

"Let's review what is to come after Nobunaga's assassination, including Sekigahara."

Meaning...

"This review of the situation is meant to overturn our overall policy and create a new policy while building up the future."

"Listen," continued Masazumi. "After the 1st Siege of Ueda is the 2nd Siege of Ueda which is a battle fought alongside Sekigahara."

"That's right," said Neshinbara. "The 2nd Siege of Ueda occurs during Sekigahara when Matsudaira attempts to control a major road known as the Nakasendou. Matsudaira's child, Hidetada, is provoked into attacking Ueda Castle by Sanada Masayuki and Nobushige, but he fails. ...It is one of Matsudaira's failures related to Sekigahara."

"That's right. We can expect quite a battle since Sanada has already split in two, but given the Osaka Campaign, it is also quite convenient."

"How's it convenient, Seijun?"

Masazumi nodded at the idiot's question.

"The Osaka Campaign follows after Sekigahara. ...That is the final battle between weakened Hashiba and victorious Matsudaira. During that battle, the Sanada forces that sided with Hashiba perform a charge that reaches Matsudaira's battle headquarters. ...You could call that the last time Ieyasu's life is threatened."

So...

"It would help if we could battle Sanada's main force in advance at the 2nd Siege of Ueda. It would wear us both down, but Sanada is a small nation. ...They would have a hard time recovering before the Osaka Campaign. And as long as we can overcome that problem..."

Masazumi calmed her breathing.

"Driving Hashiba out of Edo, the Battle of Komaki Nagakute, and the Siege of Odawara. If we can complete those three things, we will be ready to place Hashiba in checkmate."

"But," said Masazumi as she looked directly at the Reine des Garous. "That should be enough of a bargaining chip against Hashiba for the European forces being invaded by them now. You can point out that they are only a few moves away from being in checkmate and ask what they are going to do about it. ...So we do not need to proactively complete the Siege of Odawara and use up that bargaining chip. We would like to wait and see what Europe will do."

That meant they had no hostile intent for Mouri or Hexagone Française.

Of course, she could not plainly state that.

As Matsudaira, Musashi would oppose Mouri as the Western Army at Sekigahara.

If they announced here they had no hostile intent, they would have to retract that statement during the history recreation of Sekigahara.

*...That would be a lot of trouble.*

She did not have any negative feelings regarding Mouri and she hoped they were the same.

"Heh heh. Don't worry. I understand exactly what you mean."

Masazumi felt relief fill her when she heard the Reine des Garous's sudden words.

She had gotten through to her.

She had proven their worth and conveyed it to her.

She had implied their lack of active hostility and that woman had understood.

*In that case, she thought.*

*...It's our turn to ask something.*

She had a question.

It related to the movements of Hexagone Française and Mouri.

"Hexagone Française...no, Mouri. Why are you here?"

Adele listened to the Vice President's words.

She knew what the girl was trying to say. After all, it was those of them soaking in the mountain stream hot spring that had first encountered the Reine des Garous.

...Why did Mouri and Hexagone Française come here?

"Was it to show off your boobs to do psychological damage!?"

"Calm down, Adele. You said that out loud."

In front of her, the Reine des Garous's back was trembling slightly.

She was laughing.

"Umm," hesitated Adele, so the Vice President cleared her throat.

"Reine des Garous. ...I would like to know why Hexagone Française and Mouri are here."

"Why do you want to know that?"

"That should be obvious. ...Because we have solved the problem given to us by Europe. Given that, why would you be driving us to war as if to monitor us?"

This was likely an act, but the Vice President continued her patronizing explanation.

"We could have begun our summer break without fighting the Siege of Odawara, so your intervention here is extremely regrettable."

Adele and everyone else had a response for that.

**Almost Everyone:** "Liar...!!!"

**Vice President:** "Wh-what!? Why are you calling me a liar!? How rude!"

**Hori-ko:** "Masazumi-sama, didn't you announce that Houjou was next while we were eating curry? Or is my sense of hearing on the fritz? Which is it?"

**Bell:** "Y-yes...she did. She...said that."

**83:** "The curry must have gotten to her brain."

**Vice President:** "I refuse to accept that explanation!"

**Sticky King:** "Oh? I'm shocked to hear it, Masazumi. For me, it goes to every part of my body."

**Obscene:** "It is more or less the same for me as well!!"

Masazumi stared at Nenji and Itoken.

*...The most infuriating part is that I don't really have a rebuttal for that...*

*I need to study up on nonhumans some more. Yes, let's do that.*

"Umm."

Masazumi resumed thinking. She had just demonstrated the value of their nation in a number of ways and she had set up the pretext needed for her question. That just left asking it.

"So. While we were enjoying our study camp, Mouri shows up. And they have teamed up against us with Houjou while insisting we have the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle right here."

*...What are they trying to accomplish with that?*

Did Europe intend to make some kind of deal with Hashiba? Since Hashiba was approaching the end of their history recreation, was Mouri offering them the Invasion of Mouri and Siege of Odawara while Hexagone Française made peace with them? Was that their plan?

*...But in that case, Paris should have begun negotiations.*

Hexagone Française was preparing for battle, so they could not make peace at the moment.

As she wondered what this was about, Masazumi asked a probing question.

She took a breath first.

"Is Mouri beginning down the path of a ruler?"

Asama was confused by Masazumi's question.

*...They're becoming the ruler of Europe?*

Why would that lead Mitotsudaira's mother to come here?

*...What does that mean?*

She was not all that knowledgeable about European history.

So she asked.

**Asama:** "Isn't Hexagone Française guaranteed by the Testament to become the ruler of Europe? Why are you asking about that here?"

**Uqui:** "Hm, the real question is when they will take the first step toward become actual rulers and not just rulers in name only. And Masazumi is saying that is happening here."

**Vice President:** "No, um, I was just asking a leading question. I was only saying it to say it."

**Almost Everyone:** "Way to ruin everything!"

**Tsukinowa:** "Maa!"

*...Oh, Tsukinowa is angry.*

She apparently had an excellent relationship with her Mouse, but she had more to say.

**Vice President:** "Well, Urquiaga is mostly right. Since they aren't thinking about making peace with Hashiba, I think this must be an effective starting point for them."

**Unturning:** "Kiyonari...I see you can actually take things seriously. That's a bit of a relief."

**Uqui:** "Narumi...I am serious about everything I say about you."

**Unturning:** "I only meant that as a compliment, not something to take so seriously."

**Uqui:** "Does that mean you actually think otherwise?"

**Unturning:** "I'll just say thank you and leave it at that."

It was kind of incredible that they could talk like that with everyone watching on.

But Masazumi still had her eyes on the Reine des Garous.

**Vice President:** "Intent is what matters here."

**Me:** "In tent!? Then why are we outside!?"

Horizon raised her right hand, waited until she had everyone's attention, and then punched him with that same hand.

"Was that supposed to be funny?"

"W-wait! You're supposed to say the *tsukkomi* while you hit me! Now try it again!"

Horizon gave the idiot such an intense sidelong glance that it seemed almost audible.

However, one person tilted their head at these antics: the Reine des Garous.

"What was that just now?"

**Asama:** "Oh, she's not part of the divine chat!"

**Vice President:** "Wait! Letting her join now would be dangerous!"

**Silver Wolf:** "Agreed! ...It would be dangerous for me as well!"

Asama had no choice but to put it off until later. Since the Reine des Garous could not participate, she explained for her.

"U-umm, Toori-kun made a gag on our cannibalistic divine chat."

"Oh, my. What kind of joke was it?"

Out of the corner of her eye, Asama saw Horizon raise her left fist. She could not reveal what Masazumi had been saying, so she chose her words carefully.

"Um...Masazumi used the word 'intent' and he interpreted it as 'in tent'."

"My," said the Reine des Garous with a slight smile. She also grabbed him and held him close.

"Ohh," he said as the side of his face sank into her chest.

...Nh.

Asama felt some anger she could not quite explain, but then the smiling Reine

des Garous spoke.

"He must have been suggesting you hold this discussion in a tent since that is the historical standard for Far Eastern military camps. I imagine that was his *intent* here."

**Laborer:** "Well done."

**Worshiper:** "It's a shame that she's an old hag, but that reversal back to the word intent is a feat a little girl just couldn't accomplish! The real shame is that she needs to be an old hag to pull it off!"

**Gold Mar:** "Come to think of it, Mito-tsan's maman does seem to bring luck to everyone she interacts with, doesn't she?"

**Mal-Ga:** "A wolf helping him get lucky...!?"

**Silver Wolf:** "Why are you looking at me!?"

Mitotsudaira realized her mother was staring over at her while pulling the idiot into her chest.

*...Eh?*

When she wondered what this was about, her mother narrowed her eyes and briefly winked.

She did not initially know what that meant, but it hit her two seconds later.

"————"

*...C-curse my mother...!*

Her mother was acting as an example.

Her mother probably thought she had placed herself "above" her daughter. And that positioning was correct given how things had gone here and given Mitotsudaira's relationship with her king.

*...Sh-she really got me here!*

Even Horizon was spinning the forearm of her raised arm and waiting to see

what happened.

*...Does this mean my mother is the strongest!?*

*No, wait. This means my mother and Horizon both have one victory each.*

Mitotsudaira realized her mother's versus-Horizon score was tied at the moment.

And three seconds later, she realized something else.

*...Isn't tying against Horizon pretty amazing!?*

She looked over in shock and found her mother was already taking action. She once more lightly embraced Horizon from behind. She held down Horizon's raised hand as if gently taking a toy from a child.

"Now, let's hear what your Vice President has to say. I'm sure it will be interesting."

Horizon looked back, but the mother looked her in the eye and then looked to Masazumi. The action also drew Horizon's gaze toward Masazumi.

"Judge."

Everyone was focused on Masazumi once more.

*...Kh...!*

In a way, this was two losses for Horizon. Mitotsudaira was furious.

**Gold Mar:** "You can really tell she has experience raising a kid, can't you?"

**Flat Vassal:** "Does that mean she used to do that with the 5th Special Duty Officer?"

*...Why did they have to point that out!?*

*Honestly, aren't we supposed to be listening to Masazumi now?*

...Huh?

Mitotsudaira realized something.

Hadn't Masazumi gotten to the point where she was asking a question?

So why was it all of a sudden time to listen to Masazumi?

*...That was well played!*

Masazumi was angry and impressed with the overwhelming volume in front of her.

She had started to ask about Hexagone Française and Mouri's intent here, but the Reine des Garous had instead demanded Masazumi speak to settle down the idiot and Horizon.

*...Could I point out that I had just asked a question?*

If so, the Reine des Garous would probably just say "Oh, did you?" and answer the question. However...

*...That would be playing into her hand.*

After all, the Reine des Garous had asked her to speak once more.

She had ignored the question about beginning down the path of a ruler.

So she was probably asking Masazumi to guess their intent in coming here.

*...Then I need to repeat what I said before.*

So she did.

"Here are my thoughts: I *thought* that Hexagone Française was finally starting down the path of Europe's ruler by recreating the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle in Houjou land."

"Oh? What made you think that?"

"Because that is the last definite loss in Mouri's history recreation."

"My, my." The Reine des Garous formed a smile on the corners of her mouth. "Mouri makes an enemy of Matsudaira at Sekigahara and is somewhat punished for it, you know?"

"I am well aware," said Masazumi. "But we have a choice as to how we will oppose each other at Sekigahara. ...And that will be determined by how we settle this Houjou battle."

Masazumi looked to the Reine des Garous's smile.

"I think Mouri came here with the intent of announcing and negotiating what kind of relationship they will have with us as preparation for Sekigahara and beyond."

That also meant to apply pressure on Hashiba through the Invasion of Mouri and the Siege of Odawara.

*...That means it is a strategy looking to the post-Hashiba world.*

"And if we are to negotiate, there is an option on either extreme: cooperation or separation. Am I wrong, Reine des Garous?"

"You certainly are self-conscious," said the Reine des Garous with a smile. "But it does seem you can think about how the world will change. ...Fine, then. Let us hold a tea party with Terumoto during your travel day tomorrow."

Everyone looked up.

They were all focused on the Reine des Garous who rested her chin on Horizon's head.

"Staying over on the Musashi tomorrow sounds like a lot of fun. I can say hello to everyone who has looked after my daughter. And her friends too."

"What!? No!?" shouted Mitotsudaira.

**Gold Mar:** "Does this mean Ture-yan brought Mouri all this way just so she could have a home visit with and harass Mito-tsan?"

The problem was that Masazumi also felt like that might be the real answer.

"Anyway," she said with a clap of her hands.

They had scheduled a meeting with Mouri for the following day. So...

"Ohiroshiki, Aoi, we have a visitor, so cook up whatever food you can manage with that small campfire. She already bathed in the hot spring, so make sure it isn't anything with a strong smell."

# **Chapter 3: Closed Room Destroyer**

## 第三章

### 『密室のデストロイヤー』

歌声の明るさは  
心なのか  
強がりなのか  
配点（そのとき悲劇が）



*Does the brightness of your singing voice*

*Come from the heart*

*Or from feigned courage*

### **Point Allocation (A Tragedy Occurred)**

"Now, Na-chan. Just because you can't join the fight and are building up stress, doing karaoke on your own just seems unhealthy to me. ...Oh, can I place an order? We'll have three raw piroshki tsubuan and...four? You want one too, Na-chan? Wow, that's surprising. C'mon, you don't need to glare like that. ...We'll also have a serving of ginger cookies and a chicken appetizer set. To drink we'll have four ginger sodas and four red wines. What do you want, Na-chan? You've already ordered? Oh, then add one green tea. ...Testament. We'll order more later, so that's good for now. Address the receipt to the 'Shibata Forces' and label it 'Meeting Funds'."

Toshiie closed the ordering *lernen figur* and faced forward from the fur sofa.

The low table contained fried vegetable chips, green tea in an insulated wooden mug, and a karaoke song-selection unit. The stage across the table had an acoustic *lernen figur* open and someone stood in front of the guitar and drum set that came with the room.

"Don't just track me down like this. It's creepy."

"What idiot would rent the room under the name Sassa Narimasa if he didn't want to be found?"

Narimasa was holding a guitar and Fuwa hopped onto the stage next to him with a microphone in hand. She wore an M.H.R.R. girls summer uniform.

"Anyway, what's with the guitar? Were you playing along with the accompaniment without even singing?"

"Shut up. And it's not a guitar; it's a bass."

"Huh?" Fuwa frowned and held the microphone to her mouth. "Is playing bass with the accompaniment any fun? Is it supposed to be some kind of training?"

"Are you mocking these heavy bass strings, you dumb girl!?"

"Only an insecure guy feels the need to call a girl dumb. Now let me switch on the reverb and say that again: *insecure*."

"Why you..."

Narimasa glared at her, but Fuwa did not care.

Toshiie ignored it all and chose a song with Matsu on his right shoulder.

"Ma-chan, there's nothing quite like singing a duet, is there? Oh, how about Janissary Exercise #2? ...Part the Red Sea? You do like going for the tricky ones, don't you?"

"God, those two..." muttered Narimasa.

"Yes, yes," said Fuwa. "If you're worried about Takigawa, don't head out into town for karaoke. Stay in the ship and keep an eye on the reports. That at least lets you plan out your next move right away."

"Yeah, but Takigawa has ended all communication with us. And she's across the Houjou border, so there's nothing we could do regardless."

"Yes, we are pretty much just waiting for word from Houjou," said Toshiie.

He had already added 8 songs to the list and he grabbed a rice cracker from a plate on the table. He held it up as if to inspect the color of the cooked rice.

"It sucks that ghosts can only eat the local products which have their origin as 'offerings'. Hokuriku is fine with all the rice products, but I'd be opposed to visiting Kantou and the Toukai region without preparing some food first. ...Besides, I'm sure Takigawa is trying to turn this into her loss at Komaki Nagakute."

He split the rice cracker with his teeth and lowered his shoulders.

"You know what that means, don't you? Well, that's probably why you aren't actually on your way there already."

Fuwa thought as she heard the intro for the song she had chosen.

*...Those two sure love poking at each other...*

If they wanted to discuss something, she wished they would just do it like normal people, but they always drove each other directly toward certain self-realizations while openly insulting each other.

They had always been like that, but she had recently come to understand that these exchanges were a way of preemptively working through the damage that their present or future would bring.

Name inheritors were always at the mercy of the history recreation. So to prepare themselves mentally for that, they made sure they had realized what mattered and made insults while viewing themselves in that position.

Fuwa wished they could just enjoy the present, but...

"Ah."

The lyrics had started.

*Oh, no. I didn't start in time.* Perhaps to criticize her, Sassa glared straight ahead and played a single note on the bass that did not match the melody or chord. The sound really was completely off, but she chose to ignore it just as completely. She rushed the opening line a bit, but it started with a rap anyway.

"Leaving footprints in the snowy white, we march through the dark night."

She caught up.

"Dreams of romance dance before our eyes. The enemy force is ten or twenty times our size."

*Oh, no.*

"We shout like a maniac and charge in to attack."

"Are you making fun of me!?"

"Oh, c'mon. This is the Cossack Enemy Footrace from 20 years ago. Stop being so self-conscious.

"...Once every last one has been knocked to the snowy grass, they get the vodka penalty: 120 proof up the ass.

"How about that? It's like a volcano in your pants. But don't blame us; just do the Cossack dance."

The lyricist had clearly gotten drunk partway through writing this.

It was cute how Matsu swung her arms and joined in for the Khorosho Chorus that followed. But during the interlude, Narimasa gave her a sidelong glance.

"Is that any song for a girl to sing?"

"Huh? Look, everyone. This feminine guy thinks he knows how girls work. Besides, girls sing this all the time when we're having a party. Stop living in a fantasy world."

*Oh, the second verse.*

"Setting our sights beyond the tower, we march through the festival hour.

"We gallop forth to claim our prize. Their sword troops are eight or nine times our size."

She checked the lyrics.

"We hit their infantry and trample them by horse."

"Hey, how is that fair!?"

"Says the guy who has a way of trampling people.

"...Once every last one has been flattened on the snowy grass, they get the piroshki penalty: hot spices up the ass.

"Can you feel it in your guts? The Tatars can really fight. If you can feel the battle, then it's tartar sauce tonight."

The end of the second verse did not have quite the same impact, so the lyricist must have sobered up by that point.

"Would a third verse have been the borscht penalty?"

"There isn't one?"

"No, it ends here. ...Okay, the next song is Maeda and Matsu's."

"You people..."

"What?" said Fuwa as she got down from the stage and roughly beckoned Narimasa. "Sassa, how long are you going to stand up there? You're in the way, so get down."

"Y'know, I'm the one who rented this room..."

"And now we're all here together."

*He's such a pain to deal with,* thought Fuwa before saying more.

"With the preparation, it's going to take at least two days before the Houjou battle is over. If you go all out right from the beginning, you'll run out of ways to kill time before then, right? And after Shibata bothered to stop at a hot spring town located back a ways from the front line."

"I wonder what Shibata's doing," said Narimasa.

Toshiie responded by opening a *lernen figur*.

"Hi, is this Shibata? What are you doing right now? ...Oh, ping pong with Lady Oichi in the hot spring break room? Isn't that just barely against the rules of the history recreation? ...That doesn't matter? Lady Oichi is really good at it? Oh, yes. ...Well, it sounds like Na-chan wants to join you there."

"I said nothing of the sort!!!"

Toshiie ended the divine transmission and turned toward the others with a smile.

"He says he's coming here. I hung up after he asked if we had a ping pong table."

"Stay awayyyy!"

"Maeda, Shibata's definitely going to bring one here after you hung up," said Fuwa.

"He probably is," said Toshiie with a smile.

*...How does Maeda feel about all this?*

Shibata's forces were attacking Hokuriku. At least in this land they were using as headquarters, Fuwa, Sassa, and Maeda were known as the Three of Fuchu.

That title was of course taken from the Testament descriptions. But since they had been given the same path, the three of them interacted a lot. By the time they had inherited their names, Shibata had already begun his invasion of

Hokuriku, so Sassa and Maeda had always returned to Hokuriku after heading out to battle elsewhere.

*...And lately we've always been together except when Sassa and Toshiie left on the Kyushu Campaign.*

They had gotten into a pretty big argument when it had been decided Maeda would go to M.H.R.R. with Hashiba.

Given the fate of his Wallenstein name and his future as Maeda Toshiie, he had taken his own life and become a ghost.

Hashiba had performed the cremation of his and Matsu's bodies and both Fuwa and Shibata had attended.

Sassa had not.

That was just the kind of relationship it was.

And it had not changed.

"Do you think you'll go join Takigawa?" she asked.

"I'd just be a nuisance if I did."

Then he would not go.

At first, his anger had flared up and he had acted like he would go, but he was restraining himself now.

It was hard to say he was restraining his emotions with reason, but that may have been because he was not the reasonable type. But even he understood the situation.

*...If he goes, this would not end the way Takigawa wants.*

Takigawa was attempting to fight the Battle of Kanie Castle that was a portion of the Battle of Komaki Nagakute.

Komaki Nagakute was a wide-range battle fought between Hashiba and Matsudaira after Nobunaga's death and it ended with Hashiba retreating.

It could be seen as the only battle against Matsudaira during Hashiba's lifetime and the only battle where Hashiba lost to Matsudaira.

From the perspective of P.A. Oda, the Battle of Komaki Nagakute could do critical damage to P.A. Oda.

It was like the Battle of Mikatagahara was for Matsudaira.

During that battle, Takigawa's forces fortified themselves in a castle but were defeated by Matsudaira.

So Takigawa had an idea during the Battle of Kanagawa.

"By recreating one of Komaki Nagakute's losses here, she can cancel out part of the burden on P.A. Oda in the future."

"That must be what she's thinking. Right, Michi?" Maeda searched for an empty room they could use to safely escape Shibata. "Takigawa is taking part in the Houjou battle with very few troops with her. She intends to end her losing battle during Komaki Nagakute with as few losses as possible. Of course, she'll have a hard time arguing the few troops with her count as losing a full-scale battle, so if we run over there to help..."

"We'll be forced to 'lose' right along with her. Isn't that right?" asked Sassa. "What are Matthias and them doing? If they have control of the Testament Union, they should be able to let us win via interpretation."

"There's no helping that. The Testament Union's control has always been weak in the east and this requires intervening in a cooperative action between Mouri and Houjou. If anyone has control here, it's Mouri as Hexagone Française."

Hexagone Française was also a problem.

"If the Testament Union tries to intervene in the Siege of Odawara, we don't know what kind of anti-Hashiba action Hexagone Française will take," said Fuwa while passing her microphone to Matsu. "Also, Sassa, you side with Matsudaira during Komaki Nagakute because you don't want to work for Hashiba. ...Go there and you'll be Takigawa's enemy."

"I'm aware of that." Sassa looked to Maeda. "Toshi, you're the one Hashiba sends after me in that battle. ...After that, I'm sent off to Kyushu and then ordered to commit suicide when I can't suppress a local revolt."

*...But?*

Fuwa sensed that nuance in Sassa's words.

She knew what he wanted to say.

If he had to recreate his suicide, then he wanted to settle everything before then. So...

"Na-chan, no putting pressure on me, okay?"

"I already told you I'm not going. ...It'd all be over if I did."

Takigawa knew that as well.

And Sassa would know that Takigawa knew that.

*...In a way, these two are the ones Takigawa least wants to show up.*

Because they worked for Shibata, Takigawa had helped them out a lot in the past. So she probably had her own thoughts about these issues.

And that was why.

"I'm not going."

"No, you're not." Maeda stood up. 'But I think it's an underclassman's duty to see their upperclassmen off, Na-chan."

"Yeah, but how?"

Just as Sassa asked that, the door suddenly opened.

*...Eh? Wasn't that fast even for Shibata!?*

Fuwa was confused and Sassa armed himself with a plate from the table as he turned around.

"So you showed up after all, you dumbass!"

Sassa shouted toward the person in the doorway.

"H-huh!? What are all of you doing here!?"

It was a tentacle.

The first one to speak was Toshiie.

He looked to Mori who had come in through the room's entrance.

"Mori, you do karaoke?"

"Eh!? Oh, Testament! Singing is the pastime of a cultured warrior! I'm completely hooked on love songs recently!"

"Apparently this tentacle likes to make a lot of noise while mating."

"Y-you're mean, Lady Fuwa! I am not like those tentacles of the wild kingdom! I am an intellectual tentacle!"

"Right, right." Toshiie nodded along with Mori. And, "So why are you here?"

"Eh!? Oh, Testament! I've been so busy with work lately that I thought I would spend today studying the words and emotional expressions used to describe love and romance."

"Hey, tentacle, tentacle."

"My name is not tentacle! You always treat me like a joke, Fuwa! When P.A. Oda's Playing With Yourself Research Club was taking suggestions for their R-Genpuku game's title, you were the one that submitted Tentacle Crossing: New Leaf! And now they're putting out a sequel!"

"Oh, they chose that one? And it sold well? Isn't that great, Mori? You're popular."

"That tentacle that goes around attacking people isn't me! Besides, what does the New Leaf part even mean? I don't have leaves!"

"But Mori means forest and forests have leaves."

"Th-that's just an inherited name, so it isn't really me!"

"This tentacle is making excuses," said Fuwa. "But anyway, I've got a good love song here."

"Eh? What kind of song is it?"

Fuwa took the microphone from Toshiie's hand.

"Okay." She glared at Mori. "How about that? It's like a volcano in your pants. But don't blame us; just do the Cossack dance."

"Th-that isn't love! Besides, does it have to mention pants!? If you need those for love, what hope do I have!? Ahh, I want love! Not all this stickiness, but love!"

"Mori, you can slam yourself against the wall if you like, but why are you here?" asked Toshiie.

"Eh!? Oh, right. I asked for a karaoke room and they sent me here."

"Ohh." Fuwa briefly looked up at the ceiling and then faced Sassa. "Looks like they've grouped you with the tentacle."

"They only did that because the rest of you are here too!"

"Ah, Master Sassa just tried to distance himself from me, didn't he!? But don't worry, Master Sassa, I am a normal tentacle with no interest in guys! You have nothing to fear when you're around me!"

Sassa tried to escape outside while acting fed up with it all, but Fuwa grabbed the hem of his uniform to stop him.

"Yes, yes." Mori nodded when he saw that. "You are such a nice person, Lady Fuwa. I'm glad we can all be together like this."

"It's more that I won't let him escape, but whatever."

Fuwa then looked up at the ceiling and thought for a moment.

"Mori, you're returning to your territory with Sakuma, aren't you?"

"Testament! I arrived here to help out at the Battle of Novgorod, but once Sakuma is healed and returned to duty, I'll be heading back to my territory for a bit!"

"Well, I'm sure you'll be back here before long. ...But, Mori, that means you can't be singing karaoke all on your own."

When Mori heard Fuwa's words...

"—————"

...he went limp.

"Eh?"

Everyone was somewhat disturbed by how much Mori looked like pasta.

And about 3 seconds later, he quickly lifted up his head, and...

"S-sorry! I was just so surprised by Lady Fuwa's unexpectedly kind words that I got anemic and went limp!"

"This tentacle just went flaccid when a girl said something nice to him."

"N-no, I was just surprised is all! These things happen! Right, Master Maeda and Master Sassa!?"

"Calm down," Toshiie said to both Mori and Fuwa. "You'll be back with us before long, won't you?"

"Testament! ...I have to return here after I finish the work I have back there!"

"Have to?" asked Fuwa.

It was Sassa who nodded and pointed at the tentacle with his thumb.

"He also has a rough time during Komaki Nagakute."

"Testament! I accomplish nothing, rush out onto the front lines in the hopes of doing something of value, and get killed instantly when Naomasa puts a bullet between my eyes!"

"Yeah, you really are useless," said Fuwa.

"Wh-what are you talking about!? Don't I at least get an A for effort!?"

"Calm down," said Toshiie again. Then he smiled. "Mori, you're going to have trouble finding a good time for your duel with Musashi, aren't you?"

"Testament. If possible, I would like to meet Naomasa as soon as possible and explain away our misunderstanding. ...Oh, b-but it isn't much of a misunderstanding."

"Your stickiness?"

"Why do you always say things like that, Lady Fuwa!? A girl should be more modest!"

"Sassa, this tentacle keeps lecturing me today."

"Mori pretty much never lectures me."

"Of course I don't, Master Sassa! You're so cool and I secretly wish I could be like you! You're actually pretty popular with the girls, you know?"

"Oh?" Fuwa spread her mouth horizontally in a smile. "It seems you're popular."

"I'm not popular with myself, so it doesn't matter."

"Yes! That's it! That's wonderful! I wish I could say those things so smoothly! I'm always so wet, but I want that kind of dry wit! Oh, but it's bad for my skin if I dry out. ...What am I supposed to do!?"

"Good question." Toshiie checked the *lernen figur* clock. "Now, I would suggest we flee, but I fear it's already too late."

"Eh?"

Mori tilted his entire body just before they heard a loud impact from the karaoke shop's entrance.

Both the walls and the floor shook and creaked as a deep and booming voice reached them.

"Heyyy! Naru-Naruuuu! Let's play some billiards!"

"What happened to ping pong!?"

"Huhhhhhh? Naru-Naru, do you like hitting that flimsy little ball against the wall? You're a depressing guy. I mean, wow that's depressing. I bet you go to a karaoke place and play bass all on your own."

"God, you're so annoying!"

Sassa sighed in front of the door just as a billiards table broke through the door and wall.

"Okay. This has gotten rather troublesome, but I managed to contact Shibata-kun's group and I was given a lot of information and assignments, so it's time for a strategy meeting."

Someone spoke below the night sky.

It was a long-lived girl in glasses in the moonlight atop a P.A. Oda ironclad

ship.

A few people were lined up alongside her, but she faced forward as she spoke. There was a smile on her lips and her tone was casual.

"Umm, after coming this far, I won't be using the name Takenaka Hanbei anymore. His Testament descriptions say he died of illness before the attack on the Chugoku region was underway. So you can still call me Takenaka in casual settings, but please use Kuroda Kanbei in formal ones. ...Oh, and don't use the new name when you don't have to. I'll be slow to react to it and might even ignore you."

With that, Takenaka opened some *lernen figur*. She opened 200 all at once.

Those lights spread out in front of the people sitting on the deck.

They were all leaders for the invasion of Paris. Takenaka displayed an additional 100 around herself and gave commands via eye motion control.

"Everyone, please forward this onto the kids under your command. ...Now, to review the situation."

She opened a terrain map of Paris. The center contained a star-shaped city.

"Paris's center is approximately 3km in diameter. Include the outer area and that grows to 12km. Trying to surround and flood all of that would honestly take way too much work, so we'll only be flooding the central 3km. The work will take all of tomorrow. ...Now, I already know the answer, but are you all set up for your tasks?"

No one responded to Takenaka's question.

But as she looked around...

"#7? Hachisuka-kuuun?"

There was no response, so she tried again.

"Koroku-kuuun, who finally matches her name since she's in the 6th year of elementary school now?"<sup>[1]</sup>

A *lernen figur* appeared next to her face and a voice came from it.

"I'm on my way there, so quit calling. And I used my technical

accomplishments to skip enough years to be in high school, so don't call me that."

The image was a girl sitting on the bank of a small stream flowing through a grassy plain and below a morning sky. She wore a yukata, her shoulder-length hair blew in the breeze, and several *lernen figur* floated around her, displaying various gauges and diagrams with humanoid shapes.

She looked around her.

"The construction of the virtual cockpit is going well. Although I'd like to add in a bit more detail to better match my memories of where I was born."

"Hachisuka-kun? I really don't think you should say much about that."

"I know the limit," said the girl, Hachisuka. "I know just when to shut my mouth so I won't be taken away."

Then one of the people lined up alongside Takenaka spoke up. It was Wakisaka. She shook her black hair and wings and asked a question of Hachisuka in the *lernen figur*.

"Shouroku<sup>[2]</sup>, how long until you arrive?"

"Looks like about 5 minutes."

Hachisuka sighed and pulled up her feet which were soaking in the stream.

She stood up. Then her yukata instantly transformed into an M.H.R.R. girl's inner suit. The boys on the deck responded to the scene on the *lernen figur*.

"Ahh..."

"Damn, that was too quick! The processing was too fast! At least drop 3 frames!"

"Ha ha... I guess I was naive to expect a long transformation scene like the Technohexen do..."

"Hmm." Takenaka nodded and looked to the others. "Do you want to see it that badly?"

"Shaja!"

The boys did not hesitate to respond and the girls did not hesitate to give

them looks of contempt.

But Takenaka nodded a few times, and...

"Koroku-kuuun, could you maybe take life a little slower?"

"And cause high damage to my life?"

"It would give everyone here a high return."

"No thanks."

Hachisuka gave them all a sidelong glance and even skillfully moved her targeting *lernen figur* so it was directed only at the boys.

"I won't forget what you all look like. And you sure are filthy for being that much older than me. ...You could learn a thing or two from Mori the Tentacle."

"Huh, huh? What does Mori-kun have to do with this?"

"Testament. He helped me when I was gathering materials in the east. He's a tentacle, but he takes things seriously."

"Ah, Master Shibata! When did you place these two billiards balls at the base of my neck!? You can't do that kind of joke when there's a girl present! You just can't! ...And Master Maeda, why are you pointing at me and laughing!? You're drunk, aren't you!? You must be drunk! ...Master Sassa! Quit playing nine-ball on your own and help me! Fuwa-sama, don't you dare get near me with those balls!"

"P.A. Oda's morals have been slipping since we joined M.H.R.R."

Katou Yoshiaki, Ten Spears #3, thought about what Hachisuka said.

*...Koroku really does take things seriously...*

Koroku was their youngest member if they did not count Mitsunari whose artificial personality was still under development. And even if they did ignore age...

"Kime-chan, Shouroku is at her wits' end again."

"I don't hear a smile in your voice, Angie."

Angie was a worrier. She seemed to casually move through their group like it was nothing, but that was why she noticed when anyone changed.

The rest of them understood quite well why Hachisuka was feeling the pressure.

"Okay, before Hachisuka-kun gets here and we start work on flooding Paris, let's take a quick look at what Mouri and Musashi are up to, since that too affects Hexagone Française's situation here."

Takenaka opened a *lernen figur* that displayed a certain location.

"Ah," said Fukushima when she saw the large map of Kantou.

That was far to the east of here.

The emblems of the Houjou Association of Indian States and Mouri were displayed at the southwest end of Kantou.

Musashi's emblem and ship icon were north of that.

A red ribbon line added a route to Houjou for the Musashi icon.

"Mouri has chosen to fight the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle against Musashi instead of us."

Her tone was light, but what she said was absurd.

And that may have been why Katagiri raised his hand despite already knowing that information.

"They can't just say Musashi is us. How are they going to solve that?"

"The trick to that is having the history recreation double as the Siege of Odawara."

Yoshiaki had a thought when she saw Takenaka's shoulders droop.

*...Oh, that's the same reaction she had when explaining it to us in the dining hall.*

Was changing it too much effort or did she think that reaction was the most effective? Either way, their strategist sighed.

"There is no real problem with a plan to complete Odawara and Bitchu Takamatsu Castle simultaneously. Here in P.A. Oda...oh, whoops. I mean M.H.R.R. That was a close one. ...Anyway, um, M.H.R.R. completed multiple history recreations at Novgorod and the Testament Union is supposed to seek the shortest and least damaging solutions, so we can't really complain that they're *doing us a favor*. When they use our position as the Testament Union against us, we have no choice but to agree."

She pointed her thumb toward the space behind her.

"Also, Hexagone Française claims what we're doing here is an invasion of Hexagone Française trying to masquerade as the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle."

So...

"Since we ignored the history recreation and invaded someone else's territory, they want us to overlook something as 'small' as using Musashi in our place."

Hexagone Française had guts.

*...They're asking us to overlook their violation of the history recreation because we're supposedly violating it too.*

That sounded like something that delinquent President of theirs would say.

Yoshiaki sort of liked that way of thinking, but...

"Takenaka...but doesn't that mean Hexagone Française will view us as rule-breakers and seriously fight back against us?"

That was something Takenaka had not said in the dining hall earlier. In a way, it was a question Yoshiaki had been able to ask because she had heard everything in advance.

**Kuro-Take:** "W-wait, wh-what? This...this wasn't part of...we didn't plan for..."

**Kimee:** "Oh, sorry. Are adlibs not allowed?"

**AnG:** "Kime-chan, you really show no mercy sometimes."

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Um, is there a sink anywhere around here?"

But Takenaka held her palms out toward everyone.

As everyone on the deck leaned forward as if to ask "Are you okay?", she stepped back to the very front of the deck and turned around.

"Ero ero ero ero."

Fukushima called out to her as she choked a few times and her shoulders shook.

"Are thou okay?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, yes. I'm fine. Sorry if I worried you. Ah ha ha ha ha. The kanitama I had for dinner — ero ero ero ero ero ero — is still pretty sour — ero ero ero ero."

"Fukushima, you shouldn't try to talk to her," said Yoshiaki while opening a Magie Figur.

It displayed the Kantou map that Takenaka had been using.

She knew it was her adlib that had caused this trouble, so she took over the part of the explanation she could manage.

She showed everyone the Magie Figur and pointed to the Musashi icon.

"Our biggest task will be how to keep Musashi in Kantou."

Yoshiaki thought, *Musashi's actions are beginning to have a clear influence on us.*

*...And after we thought we had put a stop to this at Mito.*

Fukushima and Kiyomasa had attacked Mito as a warning and also engaged them at Novgorod.

But Musashi had chosen to stand back up.

"They are currently trying to hold the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, which ends the Invasion of Mouri, on Houjou land. We were supposed to do that here at Paris, but Hexagone Française and Mouri have split apart and Mouri has chosen Musashi as an opponent at Houjou."

Was it childish of her to feel somewhat upset by that?

*...It means we weren't chosen.*

Oda, Hashiba, M.H.R.R., P.A. Oda, Catholic, and Mlasi all referred to major powers, but the future ruler of Europe had chosen to fulfill the history recreation with their enemy instead of them.

But this meant more than just their damaged pride.

"This means Hexagone Française wants Musashi's influence to affect the European war front."

The nation of Musashi was no longer an isolated existence.

No, that change had already occurred when they built trust with Oushuu during the Battle of Novgorod.

And before even that...

*...At IZUMO and Magdeburg, they established friendly relations with Hexagone Française, M.H.R.R., Qing-Takeda, Satomi, and Houjou while also making a few promises with those nations.*

It meant a lot that the previous night's Battle of Kanagawa had acted as a response to one of those promises.

With the attack on Takigawa, Musashi had taken Houjou into their post-Honnouji period. Which meant...

"P.A. Oda must set the Honnouji Incident in motion."

And...

"The Genesis Project must also be set in motion."

Katagiri looked to Yoshiaki.

*...Why is she bringing up the Genesis Project here?*

The Five Great Peaks and any major retainers would be familiar with the Genesis Project.

But most of the people here would only have been told the general outline by

their superiors.

That being...

"To end the world but not to let it end," said Yoshiaki. "That is the only way to break through the Apocalypse."

No one said anything. They simply waited quietly for Yoshiaki to continue.

And only one thing could be heard in the silence.

"Ero ero ero ero...urp."

□□凸: "You really need to stop that, Takenaka-san! And that last one sounded far too real!"

**Kuro-Take:** "Yeah, but it's not that easy. This is from the pressure, not motion sickness."

**Kimee:** "If you don't get back here soon, I'm moving on without you."

Yoshiaki looked to everyone and spoke.

"The entire world has begun to look beyond Oda and Hashiba. But that is not enough if the world is to survive like we want. ...For the people who will live on into the future, Oda and Hashiba are nothing more than a series of inconvenient battles. But we cannot be ignored," she said. "So we will use everything at our disposal to quickly complete the flooding of Paris and intervene in the Siege of Odawara. ...We will keep Musashi in Kantou until summer break begins and we will ensure the Genesis Project can advance."

"Please wait."

Yoshiaki heard Katagiri's voice.

"If Hashiba intervenes in the Siege of Odawara, we risk beginning the Battle of Komaki Nagakute. We should select an intervention team that would not trigger that battle."

Katagiri had suggested that to Takenaka while preparing for this in the dining hall. He sounded more thoughtful now, so...

*...He must have been able to gather his thoughts.*

"Testament." Yoshiaki nodded. "I am sure they have their own plans, but anyone who took part in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle in the Testament descriptions will remain here. Otherwise, Hexagone Française might claim we never even intended to do the Invasion of Mouri. ...So we will send in an advance intervention team made up of those with little to no participation in Bitchu Takamatsu Castle and they will obtain the right to battle Musashi. They will monitor the Siege of Odawara, to ensure Houjou and Musashi are not colluding together."

Who would be on that team?

"First, Angie and me. We came all this way to support you, but we will be using Zwei Fürstin to travel to Houjou. And in a high-speed transport ship following us..."

"Testament!"

A girl stood up from the group seated on the deck. She was short and had short black hair. That unarmed girl in an M.H.R.R. girls uniform was an unfamiliar face, but...

"I am Kani Saizou! ...On Takenaka-sama's instructions, I will be joining Fukushima's team today! And starting tomorrow, I will participate in the Siege of Odawara in Fukushima-sama's place!"

Fukushima watched the girl jog over to her with excellent posture.

*...She is just as energetic as Takenaka-sama said.*

She was apparently just one school year younger, but her height made her look even younger than that.

However, she brought her feet together and came to stop in front of Fukushima without wobbling at all.

"Fukushima-san! I look forward to working with you!"

She bowed.

**AnG:** "They're both little, but her character is so different from Shouroku's. Is she the type to use her real name on the divine network?"

**6:** "I can already tell she would get on my nerves... #1, keep her away from me."

**Llaf:** "Oh, sure. But she does have an inherited name."

There were skilled people who did not have an inherited name.

But if she had one and was a fighter...

"How skilled are thee?"

"Testament! I hit Houzouin-sensei 3 times in a row!"

"3? Were 2 of those right at the start?"

"Testament! After I got 2 right away, he bowed down and said, 'No! I can't keep going at this rate! Please! Just once! You only have to do it once!', so I hit him right on the head!"

"I see that teacher hasn't changed."

Fukushima had done that, too. In a way, it may have been a standard gag with him.

But Kani took a breath and smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered. And...

"But! I was no match at all for Majority-sensei!"

"————"

Everyone was dumbfounded by the person Kani was referring to. And after a while...

**Kimee:** "It's unusual for her to do something."

□□凸: "It really is. ...I had heard she was living in seclusion since training all of you."

**Kuro-Take:** "She probably understands that Musashi is getting closer to us."

With that post, Takenaka had returned.

She waved hi to Kani before speaking.

"Okay, Fukushima-san, she'll be your underclassman, so look after her."

"Eh? Oh, Testament."

When Fukushima said that, Kani turned back toward her. And...

"Thank you very much!"

She bowed again. But for Fukushima...

*...Umm.*

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Isn't that great, Fukushima-sama. It's your first underclassman."

**Llaf:** "Even if I was informed in advance, this is far too sudden..."

She honestly had no idea how to handle this. She had always been one to mostly do things on her own.

According to the Testament, Kani Saizou was a wandering warrior who hopped around between Maeda, Oda, and others before finally working for Fukushima. He had been so skilled on the battlefield that he took too many heads to carry back with him and instead marked them by placing bamboo leaves, which were meant to be reminiscent of his spear, in the slain foes' mouths or spear wounds.

He had also been known for his courtesy and the other commanders had tried to model themselves after his behavior, but...

*...The Ten Spears do not really handle courtesy well...*

No, she thought they were courteous enough.

So why did she feel like they had something unique to them outside of courtesy?

*...I hope this will work out...*

Takenaka had said Kani would not actually be joining the Ten Spears.

She would start out as an aide to the Ten Spears as a whole.

After all, their unit tended to act independently, so even though they had junior members, those members ended up as no more than a rear guard. Even if they acted on Takenaka's instructions, they would not stand out much as a fighting force.

Thus, they needed an aide to give them a more active role.

Then why was Kani being sent to the Siege of Odawara for her own independent action?

"Use this chance to participate and experience the flow of battle. Thou will be commanding troops from now on, so it is crucial that thou see all there is to see on the battlefield and learn that thy decisions will be based on more than just thy own skill."

"Testament!"

Her response and expression were bright. Fukushima also sensed some uncertainty there, but experience would fix that.

"One thing."

"...What is it?"

"On the battlefield, there is something like a monster that will devour thee no matter how much thou prepare for it."

"Is that...a specific enemy?"

There was curiosity on Kani's face and Fukushima shook her head.

"It is the flow of battle."

That was not an enemy, an ally, a specific person, or even oneself.

It was all of that intertwined.

Kani's expression was one of hearing something for the first time. She nodded, but she clearly did not understand. However, she did speak.

"Will I figure that out once I'm on the battlefield?"

"Testament." Fukushima nodded. "If thou cannot figure it out, it would be difficult to leave thee in charge of any troops."

"...Testament."

The connection between going to Houjou and what Fukushima was talking about finally seemed to click for her.

"I'm supposed to observe the battlefield and come to understand the flow of

battle, correct?"

"Realizing that is more than enough for now."

"Testament!"

6: "It's time you ended that stuffy nonsense. I can already see you."

Hachisuka's *lernen figur* had moved. It was now to the southeast, placing it on the route they had taken.

And the moonlight shined on something approaching along that route.

...*Mountains?*

Fukushima could see materials.

8 transport ships were overloaded with materials. The cargo was piled up higher than the height of the ships themselves and even stuck out from the sides. As they all viewed those ships, Takenaka nodded.

"Good. It looks like she got the gravitational control just right. They just have to fly along the route we took and..."

Takenaka suddenly nodded and turned toward the others with a smile.

"Now, a question."

...*Huh?*

Fukushima was confused and she saw Takenaka raise her right index finger.

This had not been a part of what they planned in the dining hall. But Takenaka had trouble adlibbing, so if she was doing this...

...*Had she prepared for this even earlier?*

Takenaka's voice seemed to answer her.

"Hachisuka-kun is approaching along the route I gave her with lots of materials in tow. Now, how long do you think it will take for her to arrive?"

*Well...* thought Fukushima as she worked a few equations in her mind.

But Kiyomasa took a step toward Takenaka.

"Um, Takenaka-sama? I really do understand what you're trying to say. But, um...is that really something to do here?"

"Ohh, you actually figured it out?"

*...Oh, I get it.*

Fukushima also understood what Takenaka was trying to say. But Kani in front of her was a different matter.

"Um! What does that mean, Fukushima-san!?"

"How should I put this? Do thou know what Takenaka-dono's Urban Name is?"

"Testament! It's High Damage High Return!"

Kani's answer was followed by two voices and one action.

The first voice was Takenaka's:

"Corrrrrrect!"

She was pointing at Kani. The other voice came from the grassy field on the *lernen figur* as Hachisuka frantically turned toward them.

"Ah, wait! #9!"

Then came the action.

*...Oh.*

One of the approaching transport ships was pierced through by a diagonal blast from the bottom left.

It was a white beam of light.

Specifically, a dragon cannon.

Kani saw it happen.

*...Eh!?*

Everyone else on the deck also looked back with an "Eh?" of their own. The lead transport ship was tilted. It had been fired through from the bottom left to

the upper right.

*...Umm! From what I was taught, the shockwave will leave through the newly-made holes and its own weight will cause it to fall to the lower left!*

That was exactly what happened. With successive explosions, the lead ship scattered materials and tilted forward. And...

"Takenakaaaa!!"

Hachisuka's voice and an explosion that sounded like distant thunder reached their ears.

At the same time, Takenaka raised her arms and shouted with a smile.

"Hooray!! The decoy worked!!"

# **Chapter 4: Manager of the Sky**

## 第四章

### 『空の管理者』



竜が吠えれば  
魔女が踊る  
人はそのとき  
何してる  
配点（観戦）

*When the dragon roars*

*The Technohexen dance*

*What are the people*

*Doing at that time?*

### **Point Allocation (Watching)**

The explosion in the distant southern sky was made of ether light instead of flames.

It was visible from an elevated area containing a vast flower garden and vegetable garden with a white mansion in the center. A nude young man stood on the roof with his arms crossed.

"As I thought. ...They will go along with our decision, but they will not resign themselves to being ruled over."

"Roi-Soleil," said a *Belle de Marionnette* woman kneeling on the roof. "What is their inherited name?"

"He claims to be of Germanic descent. He is a mercenary captain from M.H.R.R. and passed through Sweden and Denmark before arriving here in Hexagone Française. He calls himself Bernard. Are you familiar with him, Henri?"

"That would be Bernard of Saxon, wouldn't it?"

"Testament. ...According to the Testament, he is the 11th son of a duke. With no hope of inheriting the position of prince-elect, he attempted to become a knight, but the current age turned him into a mercenary captain." He sighed. "He is one of those who did not respond even to Anne's search. But he did wish to be registered as part of the nonhuman unit Anne reconstructed. That was likely arranged when the Reine des Garous's former friends were being invited in. That may mean he sees Anne as his master rather than me, but I do not mind."

"I see. ...Oh, Roi-Soleil, do you want some dinner?"

Armand had climbed up onto the roof from the back. He had a maid *Belle de Marionnette* throw him a plate from the open-air kitchen in the backyard.

"Looks like fish today. Tomorrow will be Far Eastern and meat."

"Ho ho? Did Terumoto plan this? Splendid."

"Testament. ...But the *signe cadre* from the princess has something absurd listed for tomorrow's dinner: both beefsteak *and* pork cutlets."

"Armand."

Still down on one knee, Henri glared at her colleague who had brought a table onto the roof and began lining up plates on it.

"The Princess is using that meal plan for good luck. In Far Eastern, the English words 'steak' and 'cutlet' sound like 'wonderful' and 'victory' respectively. ...Well? Do you see what she was trying to do with those two dishes?"

Armand stared at the *signe cadre* for a bit.

"Beef wonderful...pork victory..."

After a while, something seemed to click for him.

"Oh, I get it! 'Beef is wonderful, but pork shall be victorious', right!? What a world we live in!"

Just as Henri kicked Armand off the roof, another loud noise reached them from the southern sky.

The tilted transport ship had broken and exploded.

The Roi-Soleil smiled as he viewed the blossom of light and the ether light scattered in a ring by the shockwave.

"Well done, Bernard of Saxon. ...After Hamelin 400 years ago, your people moved to the southern mountains and you protected central Hexagone Française during the Hundred Years' War. After your failure 400 years ago, you paradoxical nonhumans have attempted to erase your past while remaining proud of your glory days."

He was a...

"Dragon. After seeing the world prepare for the Apocalypse, did you finally

realize what Anne intended?"

A total of 8 transport ships had carried the extra materials needed to flood Paris.

The course they had taken followed after the main fleet. The separated Azuchi Castle had constructed that as a supply line to Paris and a route for the Great Return from Mouri.

And those transport ships had been attacked just after leaving the forests and entering the vast field around Paris.

It happened at the division between forest and field.

The first of the 8 transport ships could not withstand the anti-air dragon cannon that came from there.

A report from their allies had said Hexagone Française had no intention of attacking, but...

"Damn...!"

A voice shouted while jumping down from the tilting, shaking, and falling ship.

"If this isn't an attack, then it's the roughest greeting I've ever seen!"

But no voices rose up in protest.

Everyone had seen something.

It was visible from the deck, surroundings, and outside of the collapsing first ship.

It was a silhouette.

The giant silhouette was clearly larger than a human and it had wings and a tail.

"What is that...?"

Also, it was not alone. There were many. They wrapped around the destroyed ship and seemed to blot out its hull.

"It's a flock of dragons!"

Some were large, but the most troublesome were the small dragons that measured only about 5 meters long.

Those bluish-black dragons used their arms as wings and used their great numbers to collide with the transport ship.

"...!"

As they fired dragon cannons and dropped down with their powerful, crushing legs, the dragons pushed the ship lower and destroyed it.

"Now." The Roi-Soleil looked up to a shallow portion of the sky. "Show me the value of Anne's invitation and your pride that rejected it, Bernard."

The Azuchi Castle had descended onto the distant wheat fields leading to Paris. Beyond that, a transport ship's ether light and the dragon's dragon cannons decorated the night sky.

The small dragons flocking around Hashiba's transport ship were all small wyverns.

But they were numerous. Their numbers easily reached the thousands and they used their roars, collisions, and dragon cannons to strike the transport ship. It sounded like consecutive tremors.

"Are those...?" Henri stood up. "Are those Celestial Dragons, Roi-Soleil?"

"Yes...I suppose you could call them Bernard's mercenary corps. Although during ancient Europe's dragon invasion that inherited the Germanic name, they were apparently known as the Germanic warriors."

Meaning...

"He is a direct descendant of the dragon king. ...He is a survivor of the oldest Celestial Dragons."

A burst of light filled the sky as he spoke.

"1 minute 13 seconds."

Armand said that just as the falling transport ship ruptured.

The dragons had sunk it.

The group attack following the initial one had concentrated on the first ship which now exploded.

It looked like many of the dragons were caught in the bursting ship's shockwave.

But that was not the case.

The large dragons had sensed the coming explosion and flown away, but the small dragons had all been shattered.

They were not dead, merely broken. And they broke by becoming small bluish-black wings.

The crew of the second ship watched it happen. They saw a dark cloud push in toward them.

The shattered pieces of the small dragons had become even smaller wyverns.

"Here they come! Defense barriers!"

The anti-ship defense barriers were meaningless for two different reasons.

First, most of the opened barriers were destroyed by the dragon cannons fired by the 6 dragons hovering in the sky.

Second, those anti-ship barriers left many openings for such small dragons so the enemy easily slipped between those walls.

The dragon bombardment tore through the barriers.

The ether light of destruction flew as the small dragons collided.

The large dragons continued firing without worrying if they would hit any of the small dragons.

The small dragons were broken by the dragon cannons, but that just meant they split apart.

"They're multiplying...!?"

As an evacuation alarm blared through the second ship, the crew slipped through the gaps between the small dragons dropping down onto their ship.

"These wyverns don't have physical bodies! They're multiplying!"

"Multiplying wyverns...!"

"Do we really have time for this conversation!?"

"Nope!"

Just as they exchanged a handshake, a dragon cannon hit and they were all thrown out into the air.

At the same time, the 2nd ship tilted and the ropes and pallets holding down the materials collapsed. The collision of the small dragons and the dragon cannons tore the ship apart and a blazing red appeared in places.

"They're going for the next one!"

With the sounds of wings flapping and feet kicking off of the ship to leap, the overall motion divided into two groups.

The vortex of small, bluish-black dragons split apart as it wriggled through the night.

One group descended on the second ship like ravenous ants.

The other group flew toward the third ship with the large dragons.

They continued.

Those watching and those defending did not have time for any kind of countermeasure.

It was the same as with the second ship. The third ship put up defense barriers and the large dragons prepared to launch dragon cannons toward those.

They fired.

It should have been a total of six white lights, but only five flew out.

One of the large dragons had been shattered.

Blood spray that looked black in the night and chunks of flesh burst and fell from the right wing and right shoulder to show it had been hit.

There was a line in the sky beyond the falling large dragon. Something shot

from north to south in the dark sky and white fog trailed behind it.

Someone had flown swiftly and struck the dragon.

Everyone looked up and shouted their identity.

"Zwei Eisen!"

The second ship exploded at the same time.

Light and wind formed while two silhouettes looked down on it all from what could be called the peak.

Black and gold.

The colored pair had wings of those two colors and held long cannons of the same colors.

"————"

They said nothing as the cannons transformed into their flight forms. Then they made a powered descent toward the third ship and large dragons below.

*Oh, this is not good,* thought Wakisaka to help calm herself.

This was a battle. At high altitude. Where they had to descend and fire. All of those movements required her to focus, but there was also something else she had to think about.

*...Kime-chan is in a bit of a bad mood, isn't she?*

Yoshiaki was the type to make a plan and follow it.

In the Ten Spears under Hashiba's command, Fukushima was the leader and Takenaka did the largescale planning as their staff officer, but Wakisaka and Yoshiaki were mostly independent members of the group.

Thanks to the mobility provided by Schwarz Fürstin and Weiss Fürstin, they were chosen when an immediate response was needed.

But even when at the mercy of various strategies like that, Yoshiaki would put together a plan of her own.

She would come up with a course for Schwarz Fürstin and Weiss Fürstin,

tactics for them to use, and other things like that.

There was a reason for that.

The biggest reason was her personality, but in addition to that...

*...It's because she's a Technohexen.*

Technohexen spells and weapons were not fully compatible with Tsirhc, Mlasi, and Far Eastern ones.

If they were not using purely Technohexen equipment, they needed spells and tools to act as a buffer between the different systems.

And when their current method used that kind of buffering...

"It can be a concern during a serious battle."

But one wanted to eliminate all concerns during battle.

That was the greatest precondition for heading out to the battlefield.

So Yoshiaki would always make a plan before doing something. She would put together her equipment and manage herself to ensure she could fight purely in the field of a Technohexen.

But this was different.

*...This rescue battle came without any warning...*

They used their fall to accelerate. How did that powerful descent look to the dragons?

**AnG:** "Kime-chan, are you mad?"

**Kimee:** "Why would I be?"

*...Oh, she's really mad. Really, really mad.*

This was an unplanned battle.

Their part of the Paris attack was originally meant to involve a high-altitude bombing run and a three-dimensional bombardment and deterrence against the enemy gods of war.

But that had just changed to a trip to Houjou instead.

The movement of Yoshiaki's eyebrows had shown her irritation meter was filling up from that alone.

"Angie, tonight we need to take a bath, eat some good food, take it easy, and get lots of sleep before heading out early tomorrow morning."

"Ohh, that sounds great. Let's go make record time."

That was what they had said to work around the change of plans, but then they had been sent out for an emergency attack.

There was only one saving grace here:

**Kimee:** "Listen, Angie. ...This is a nearby battle, so we can take part without using up much fuel. We can get right back on schedule, so there's nothing to be angry about."

"Because," she said.

**Kimee:** "We can go full blast without even thinking about fuel."

The dragons made the first move.

The large dragons looked up into the heavens while leaving the third ship to the small dragons.

Two enemies were dropping toward them.

Not even cutting-edge Technohexen from Hashiba's main force could break through dragon shells from long range. The dragon that had been hit and shattered was proof of that.

That previous attack had been made as the Technohexen passed by.

For that reason, the dragons flapped their wings.

"———!"

All 5 of them instantly scattered from their position a short distance from the third ship.

They were still looking up into the heavens. If they looked away, they could be hit by or lose sight of the enemy.

So they kept the enemy in their sights.

The distance between them and that enemy was shrinking.

A dragon's longest range attack was the dragon cannon.

They fired that from their mouth and the straight line leading from the bottom of their throat to their rows of fangs was identical to the direction of their gaze.

If they could see the enemy and had them in the center of their vision, then they could hit.

They fired.

"...!"

The five dragons simultaneously launched 5 white lights toward the heavens.

Heat burst from the heat release openings across their bodies and their targets were the two Technohexen.

Two of the five lines came from directly below, two were diagonal, and the final one swept across their predicted evasion route.

They burst.

The five lights passed through the sky and lit up the night.

The two diagonal ones vanished.

But not because their output dropped.

They shook violently and then sputtered out.

Those two dragons had been destroyed by an enemy counterattack.

The large dragons launching those two attacks into the heavens had lost their wings and shoulders. They had reflexively protected their heads by raising their shoulders, so those were smashed from the sides and the armor exploded.

"———!?"

Despite already being in the air, the large dragons were sent flying.

Only then did the remaining three realize their fellow dragons had been defeated. They had been looking up into the sky, so they had been slow to react

to their companions on the same level as them.

That delay proved devastating.

The dragon who had lightly spun his body to fire a sweeping shot had his shoulders smashed.

The tremor that hit his lungs prevented him from even crying out in agony.

The force had hit him from the front and it properly left him from the back.

Both his wings tore and ruptured along with the armor.

The sound arrived after a delay.

But he had not seen the enemy. He had only heard the destruction of the previous two dragons. And the reverberation of this one's defeat passed through the sky as a ringing pressure.

Only two remained. They had fired their dragon cannons straight above them and they quickly took cautious action.

To search out the unseen enemy, they shut their mouths on the weakening dragon cannons despite the internal damage it would do to their throats. They also shielded all their heat release openings while instead opening all the thrusters on the front of their bodies.

"...!"

They made a short dash backwards through the sky.

The wind whipped up as the massive dragons instantly moved back by about 500 meters.

But they concluded that was not enough.

Their previous attack had included one that swept across the heavens along the enemy's evasion route.

They heard a voice behind them.

"I thought you were going to fall back even further. Why would you stop?"

Two high-pressure umbrellas had opened in the night sky.

Destruction filled the air a fair distance away from the third transport ship that was under attack.

Two shots were fired from behind the two dragons, smashing their solid back armor and wings.

Shockwaves spread out in vertical hemispheres and black and white lines burst into the sky from their center.

Two Technohexen flew as if returning from the outside to the inside of the battlefield.

Dragons fell at their destination.

And their eyes were on the third transport ship.

"Will this reach?"

The black Technohexen jumped down from her broom and used her wings to stop in midair. She held the broom under her right arm.

The Magie Figur that appeared in front of her eyes was a vision-linked targeting spell.

A magnified image of the third ship was displayed there and the Schwarz Hexen looked to the cargo loaded on it.

"Kime-chan, I'll be knocking down the cargo, so can you do the calculations for me?"

"I'm ready when you are, Angie."

"I knew you would be," said the Schwarz Hexen, Wakisaka, as her vision raced across the Magie Figur.

She locked onto three points of the cargo. Those points were marked with upside-down crosses.

At the same time, the Weiss Hexen, Yoshiaki, had three Magie Figurs opened in front of her. And...

"Ah, they noticed. This might be bad."

The image in Wakisaka's Magie Figur showed the small dragons looking back their way.

Several of them opened their mouths as if to shout something and more than twice as many flew up into the night sky.

"They'll be here in 12 seconds."

"Ohh, we'll have to leave immediately."

The Schwarz Hexen nodded and sent a single sound toward her Magie Figur.

She smacked her lips and sent it a kiss.

"Herrlich!"

The word was just for good measure. But that acted as a signal as the shots raced out.

Three shots in all.

All three of the vision-linked shots from the *schale besen* were managed by the *schale besen*. Magie Figurs provided slight acceleration to different parts of the broom to alter its aim for each shot.

But consecutive sniper shots produced a lot of recoil. That was why Wakisaka had designated all the targets in advance. While controlled like this, she had her Schwarz Fürstin focus on the movement calculations for Schwarz Fürstin itself while the recoil-reduction control calculations were performed by Yoshiaki's Weiss Fürstin.

Their *schale besen* worked together.

And they fired.

With each shot, the equations on Yoshiaki's Magie Figur changed and were solved one at a time.

"Angie, we need to get flying. Those small dragons are a poor match for our current settings."

"Testament. I'm sure Shouroku can act now that we've fired this much."

Just as they said that, the shots hit.

Wakisaka had not fired on the enemy.

She had fired on the connections between the pallets and the ropes fixing the

cargo to the third ship.

The total of three shots accurately hit their targets and the hardened ropes and pallets burst into the air.

At the same time, the materials spilled away. It was just like tilting a glass of water. And...

"Whoops."

They did not have time to watch. Countless small dragons were approaching.

Below them, the first transport ship struck the ground. Their *schale besen* measured the number of enemies lit up by the huge explosion.

"Now this is a pain-in-the-ass enemy. ...I just wish Maeda was here."

**Kuro-Take:** "Hmm, would it be difficult for the two of you to deal with them?"

**AnG:** "Wait just a moment, Takeko. Kime-chan and I are heading to Izu and visiting a hot spring tomorrow."

**Kimee:** "Testament. And at the inn, we'll eat boat-wrap sushi and shrimp and then go to the banana plantation that's been growing since the Age of the Gods to see the crocodiles and have a party. We have it all planned out."

**Kuro-Take:** "Oh, don't worry about that. We can wait until the end of your day trip."

Wakisaka broke the divine transmission *lernen figur* with a horizontal chop. And immediately...



"Oh, crap."

She and Yoshiaki held onto their *schale besen* and made a reflexive and rapid ascent.

The small dragons were chasing after them.

On the Azuchi Castle's deck, Katagiri watched the two Technohexen fly straight up with consecutive accelerations.

*...They're so fast!*

He had seen them fight several times before, but they had primarily used cannon fire in those.

It was rare for them to use the vast sky for something like a martial arts battle like this. But...

*...That means the enemy has gotten this close to our headquarters where I am...*

He was unsure if he should rejoice at the opportunity to see this.

But Fukushima had a different opinion as she watched the two of them ascend with such speed.

"They are slower than normal..."

"Eh!? Are you sure they don't just look slower because we're watching from a distance?"

"Testament. They also seem to be ascending further than normal."

"Yes," agreed Takenaka. "I sent Yoshiaki-san a bit of an idea, so you're probably right. They're flying at the perfect speed to keep those dragons on their tail and they're continuing their ascent to search for the enemy."

*...Search for the enemy?*

"They already have all those small dragons to worry about. Are there even more enemies out there?"

"No, no. That's not what I meant." Takenaka narrowed her eyes behind her

glasses to stare into the distance. "There's a little something that's bothering me."

Yoshiaki rose into the sky with Wakisaka.

She realized something as she did so.

*...It's as Takenaka feared.*

"The dragons haven't fallen down below."

The 6 large dragons they had defeated were nowhere to be seen on the wheat field below.

*That's unexpected*, thought Yoshiaki while holding her *schale besen* close.

She changed her vertical ascent into an upside-down flight to the west.

She could see the ground overhead. The second ship was falling while surrounded by ether light smoke. That scattering light illuminated the wheat field, but only the building materials had fallen there.

She could see nothing other than those materials and wreckage from the ships.

There were no large dragons or small wyverns.

*...What does that mean?*

They had destroyed all of those large dragons, but those were not lifeforms that died instantly. They had a heart in each section of their body and they had a ganglion that acted in place of a cerebellum to manage each section.

But because they were so large, the destruction of their wings or some other part of their body would prevent them from immediately balancing their weight and they would be unable to fly. So if their dragon cannon firing organs had survived the fall, the Technohexen had feared they would fire some anti-air blasts.

"But..."

Just as Yoshiaki said that, Angie lined up alongside her on the right while lightly shaking her upside-down broom.

"Kime-chan, will we make it in time for the third ship!?"

Yoshiaki was briefly confused when her partner pushed her thoughts in an entirely different direction. But...

*...That's right.*

The large dragons had disappeared. That was the result the two of them had produced.

They would be leaving this battlefield tomorrow, so they did not need to puzzle this out in the middle of battle.

"Let's leave all the details to Takenaka and the others."

And...

"The third ship is Hachisuka's responsibility."

With that, Yoshiaki poured on even more westward acceleration. She chose a route that passed directly above the third ship.

Behind them, the small dragons rose up from below and continued pursuit.

*...This won't be easy.*

Yoshiaki chose not to say that out loud as she increased her speed. She looked over to make sure Angie had stopped shaking her broom and was holding Schwarz Fürstin tight.

"Let's go. ...To drive away the enemy."

The third ship was still under attack as the two Technohexen flew toward it.

5m wyverns clung to the 300m transport ship.

The bluish-black dragons attacked with high-speed collisions and point-blank dragon cannons after attaching themselves to the ship.

It was difficult to find a part of the ship's surface without a bluish-black form on it. Ether light intermittently burst from between those forms and on occasion...

"...!"

A few dragons would fall away with a large stripped-off armor panel.

And the materials on the rear of the ship were spilling into the sky on the left and right. The ship itself rumbled and shook, shaking the materials off all the faster.

More materials were loaded below the deck on the front.

The engine system was in the back.

The small dragons were focused on the back and they began a new form of destruction.

The flock moved like a single lifeform.

"———"

They simultaneously fired on the deck to begin destruction.

With a never-ceasing rumbling, the joints of the deck cracked and the armor bent.

The rear deck was approximately 100 meters. More and more of the long steel armor split, shifted, and tilted. The cracks and splits spread faster than on the front deck.

It ruptured.

The speed of destruction was caused by the damage to the front deck. The small dragons had already gotten below the deck and they were firing their dragon cannons among the loaded materials while well aware this would damage themselves as well. The bending and lost support caused by that destruction had hastened the transformation of the rear deck.

And...

"———!"

The dragons floated up.

An entire armor panel of the rear deck was torn away along with the hardened wood blocks sitting on it. That armor panel was 30 meters long and 5 meters wide. It scattered wooden blocks and stood up like a seesaw.

The dragons were launched upwards and the buffering inner hull was

revealed below.

The dragons swarmed in. They used their wings for a short dash and slammed their heels into it. They produced solid sounds as they bent the inner hull and inhaled.

They intended to fire their dragon cannons in unison.

In an ordered action, light filled the jaws of hundreds of dragons.

"Shouroku!"

Just then, a pair of lights raced across the sky from east to west.

It was the Technohexen of the Ten Spears.

The two passed by above the third ship with small dragons still in pursuit.

Wakisaka flew through the air and saw the third ship below her for just a moment.

*...We made it in time!*

It all came down to an instant.

The Magie Figur that Yoshiaki had given her displayed their course and the critical time for passing above the third ship. That time counter was stopped with 0.2 seconds remaining.

They had made it in time.

Behind them, the army of small dragons was pushing in and accelerating.

And just before the dragons overtook the Technohexen, three powerful actions occurred.

Two of them were the Technohexen's *schale besen* firing acceleration light and gaining a burst of speed far greater than before.

The last one occurred to the dragons below and the ones up in the sky.

"...!"

They were all blasted away from the third ship.

"Oh?" said the nudist on the white mansion's roof. "I see. I was wondering how they carried all those materials, but they seem to have put an unexpected amount of effort into it. I imagine this is what Bernard was after. He would have wanted this far more than bringing down the transport ships."

"Was that some kind of barrier?"

Henri narrowed her eyes toward the black sphere in the distant sky.

It was a ball of wyverns illuminated from below by the ether light of the fallen ships. The third ship had emitted some kind of pressure that had pushed them all a kilometer away from the ship.

Their numbers had fallen, but the wyverns attempted to approach again with their overwhelming quantity.

They flapped their wings and let their numbers produce a great cry. The din sounded like endlessly fluttering cloths and seemed like it would destroy the sky.

With that noise practically pounding on his ears, Armand held a bottle of white wine.

"Hey, Henri. I've learned something from watching this battle."

"What is that, Armand?"

"Well." Armand poured the wine into the glass raised by the Roi-Soleil. "Our Hexagone Française is a real fantasy world, isn't it?"

"And you are a moving doll."

"Then do we really need any normal humans?"

"What about the princess?"

"She's normal?"

"People might have different opinions of her emotional side, but from a biological perspective, she is a normal human."

"...Isn't the non-fantasy stuff so much more of a pain to deal with?"

Armand brought a hand to his chin and pondered his own question. He viewed the wyverns in the distant sky for a few seconds, but then he turned back toward Henri.

"Oh! Is that why humanity is said to be a high-level species!?"

Henri kicked Armand from the roof just as the bluish-black sphere in the southern night sky grew darker in color.

"Tonight is a good night. And the food is excellent. So Bernard?" The Roi-Soleil took a sip from his glass. "Show us some more. I am sure that will be Isaac's opponent before long."

As if answering the Roi-Soleil's call, the wyverns prepared themselves. They increased the density of their bluish-black encirclement and they roared.

"...!"

Those roars were dragon cannons.

They numbered in the thousands and were especially focused on the rear of the third ship.

But...

"Well done. ...Did he see through it?"

The spectators watched as the wyverns took a certain action.

They instantly left that airspace.

Thousands of dragons dispersed, yet not one of them collided with another. Just as they launched their dragon cannons, they roared together and sliced through the wind to distance themselves from the transport ship.

And when the concentrated dragon cannon attack hit the third ship, something happened.

They were reflected.

Every last one of the thousands of dragon cannons were bounced back just before reaching the ship.

Light burst in the night.

The airspace within 300m of the transport ship was shaken and grew bright for just a moment.

Then the shaking reflected all of the flying dragon lights.

They bounced back.

More than a thousand dragon cannons were knocked back toward the scattering wyverns along with more than a thousand solid sounds and fragments of light.

The angle of reflection matched an elliptical surface stretched front to back.

"———!"

The wyverns that failed to evade were shattered.

After a beat, nearly 300 dragons were destroyed, but the rear of the transport ship had also collapsed.

But that was not all.

With a breaking and snapping sound, something jutted out from the bottom of the collapsed deck.

It was a metal arm.

It was colored black, covered in large armor, and at least 6 meters long.

The powerful black arm spread its metal fingers and clutched at empty air as if to grab at the heavens.

The metal fingers grasped the empty air.

There was nothing there, yet that metal hand had a definite grip.

Then the arm bent. Using its hold on the air, it pulled up the shoulder and body it was attached to.

It rose up.

That rising motion carried wreckage and fragments of the deck with it. The sound of the crumbling ship materials sounded like spilling sand.

"What a pain."

It produced a girl's voice as it stood atop the third ship's collapsed deck.

The figure standing on its toes was surrounded by heavy armor and had a tail.

"Four Sacred Beasts God of War — Hidamari Genbu will now join the Invasion of Mouri with Hachisuka Koroku as its pilot."

Just as Hachisuka's voice said that, a light rose from the forest below.

It was identical to the initial blast. The dragon cannon that had pierced the first transport ship had been fired on the Genbu's third ship.

It was on course for a direct hit.

# **Chapter 5: Doubled Ones at the Edge**

## 第五章

### 『端っこの重ね者』



皿洗いでも  
幸せになるのは何故  
配点（御相手）

*Why do I feel happy*

*Even while washing dishes?*

### **Point Allocation (My Partner)**

"That's the first attack!"

Kiyomasa heard Takenaka's sharp exclamation.

Of course, *this was not actually the first attack.*

But it was clear what their staff officer meant.

*...This is the same type of dragon cannon that pierced the first ship at the beginning, isn't it!?*

During the several minutes of battle, only the initial attack had pierced through a transport ship. The large dragons' dragon cannons and the wyverns' attacks had not been powerful enough to sink a ship in one shot.

They now knew where the enemy that could do that was.

**AnG:** "In the forest!!"

Kiyomasa saw the white light of Technohexen fire near the bottom of the night.

At the same time, light burst in the sky.

**6:** "Genbu."

The enemy's max-power dragon cannon approached Hachisuka's Genbu.

**6:** "Right hand compression."

It was unclear what she had done to the diagonally-fired blast, but...

*...It was deflected!*

The reflected white scattered in the sky. And not in a straight line.

It was a sphere.

The dragon cannon was now shaped like the full moon as it flew through the night sky.

"Oh, dear."

Kiyomasa was not the only one. Everyone else on the deck voiced their surprise as well, then it burst. The southern forest, plain, and wheat field all looked bright because the scattered ether light was raining down on them.

The enemy's attack had been blocked. However...

**Kimee:** "They disappeared."

Yoshiaki's words reached them.

Kiyomasa viewed Yoshiaki's words on her *lernen figur*.

**Kimee:** "We didn't hit anything in the forest. They seem to have moved."

□□凸: "Are they not cheating with gods of war like they did before?"

**Kimee:** "That was an anti-ship cannon, so even a god of war would have had a hard time of it."

**Llaf:** "Then where did the enemy go?"

**AnG:** "Nari Nari~?"

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Please stop calling me that. ...I will be able to perform a detailed scan once they approach the Azuchi a little more. I cannot do it the way things are now."

**Kimee:** "I appreciate your honesty."

**AnG:** "Then what do we do, Kime-chan? Head back? Go visit someplace?"

*Oh?* thought Kiyomasa.

**Kiyo-Massive:** "You two? What about the enemy?"

**Ang:** "Eh? Oh, they're gone. Maybe they retreated after Shouroku's Kiddie Reflex."

**6:** "Don't call it that."

*That seems fairly accurate, though,* thought Kiyomasa as she viewed them through a telescope spell *lernen figur*.

In the southern night sky, beyond the separated Azuchi, a transport ship had been stripped of most of its armor. That third ship was trailing ether light like smoke.

*...The Genbu was holding all the ships' cargo in place with gravitational control, wasn't it?"*

6: "Keep an eye on my surroundings. I ended my gravitational control of three ships to make an appearance, but I'm still controlling the five ships after that."

However, the enemy was indeed nowhere to be seen.

At the very least, the army of small dragons was no longer in the sky.

But Fukushima frowned next to Kiyomasa.

"It looked like they faded into the darkness..."

"My, how poetic, Fukushima-sama."

"Was that elegant?"

"Testament," confirmed Kiyomasa. She pointed into the distance where the transport ships were correcting their course of approach while illuminated by the ether light rising from the sunk ships.

She placed her other hand on her cheek.

"Hachisuka-sama probably doesn't realize she is part of such an elegant scene."

Just then, five pillars of light rose from the forest on either side and struck the transport ships.

Powerful dragon cannons pierced the five ships behind the one Hachisuka was aboard.

It happened suddenly and Kiyomasa could only watch the quintuple attack.

*...Eh?*

Something appeared in the moonlight: Dragons.

They were large bluish-black dragons with their forelegs doubling as giant wings.

They dropped straight down and collided with the deck of Hachisuka's third ship.

They had landed.

*...Oops.*

Hachisuka scolded herself for being doubly careless.

First, she had assumed the enemy would target her. And second...

*...I thought they would come from below.*

They came from above.

Her mistake had been allowing the previous cannon fire to guide her focus downwards.

She had managed to react to the enemy's dragon cannon light.

But Hidamari Genbu's gravitational control was being used to hold the other ships' cargo in place. She could only protect three full ships using her gravitational control.

Once she thought about it, it was obvious that defense mattered more than the cargo, but...

"I didn't expect a quintuple attack."

"I was not expecting your praise."

She received a response from right in front of her.

A large form stood on the broken deck, lit by the glow of ether light rising through the gaps in the armor.

It was not a dragon.

It was not one of the large bluish-black dragons that had made a noisy and forced landing a moment before. Instead, it was...

**AnG:** "Some old guy?"

He appeared to be past 50.

He was more than 2 meters tall and both his shoulders and chest were broad.

His hair was tied back and he had a long beard. His face was that of a human, but he viewed her with sharp bestial eyes.

"I am Extra Special Duty Officer Bernard of Hexagone Française."

He wore an armored variant of an Hexagone Française uniform decorated with animal hair. Even in the ether light, it was the same bluish-black as the night sky.

"And you are?" he asked.

"Hachisuka Koroku of M.H.R.R. Hashiba."

Hachisuka decided it was irrelevant to him that she was part of the Ten Spears.

The enemy was not after her.

*...He's probably trying to sink the transport ships and responding to Genbu's ether reading.*

He was a Celestial Dragon.

It was doubtful if he even knew of the Four Sacred Beasts gods of war. However...

"That is an excellent god of war."

"Because it deflected your attack?"

"No." The enemy named Bernard did not even smile. "Because it protected its pilot's life."

"————"

Hachisuka was left briefly speechless.

This was what the enemy was saying:

*...Protecting my life was the most Genbu could manage?*

She considered making an attack here, but...

"It's too bad," he said.

"...This isn't the extent of Genbu's power."

Bernard did not smile. Nor did he look disappointed or scornful.

"I doubt I will be your opponent," he said.

"I was predicting the same thing."

Her opponent would likely be the Hexagone Française god of war unit and Isaac of the Three Musketeers.

The original plan was for Wakisaka and Yoshiaki to attack them from high altitude.

But those two would now be participating in the attack on Houjou. And now that Bernard's wyverns had made an appearance...

*...We can't send out many aerial forces.*

But an urban battle to defeat a city was sure to end as a ground battle.

It was up to Takenaka who made the plans, but Hachisuka was certain she would be the cornerstone of the ground battle and that she would not face Bernard there. If anyone would be fighting him, it would be...

**6:** "Mitsunari."

**Nari Nari Nari:** "I should be able to manage with assistance from 'Azuchi'-sama."

**Kuro-Take:** "Then let's assume you'll be doing some fighting at least at a limited level."

*Right,* silently agreed Hachisuka as she chose to leave the god of war.

She released her union with the Genbu with Bernard right in front of her.

It took a few seconds.

As the transport ship gradually descended, a small form stood up on the shoulder of the black heavy god of war.

It was a girl.

She wore an M.H.R.R. lightweight inner suit and she stood next to the god of

war's dragon face.

"Sorry about being all the way up here, but I'm Hachisuka Koroku, #8 of Hashiba's Ten Spears."

The large old man looked up to face her.

And he opened his mouth.

"I am the Swarm Dragon who was once the lieutenant general of the European Government Organization. ...I am now known as Bernard."

His shoulders shook.

"I look forward to meeting more than just you the day after tomorrow."

That was all.

With no bow or other farewell motion, ether light wrapped around him in an instant and he became a giant form.

He was a dozen or so times larger than the god of war. The bluish-black wyvern was more than 100 meters long and stood in the air above the transport ship.

"I have taken my souvenir."

With those words, the five damaged transport ships crashed into the earth below.

Metal strained and snapped, the ships rolled, and dirt exploded noisily into the air.

"That will cost you dearly."

By the time Hachisuka's retort was hit by the heated wind from below, Bernard had disappeared.

He instantly flew up into the night sky and soared away.

He flew to the north.

Hachisuka narrowed her eyes against the wind pressure of his wing flaps and she glanced up at Wakisaka and Yoshiaki.

"Honestly."

She lowered her shoulders and glared up into the sky.

"How much of a fantasy world *is* Hexagone Française?"

"Looking at the records from the Hundred Years' War, you can tell Hexagone Française has always had forces similar to England's."

Tenzou listened to Mary by the bank of a stream.

They were on the edge of the clearing they had gathered in before. A spring with plenty of water had formed in an area lower than the surrounding trees.

The stream flowing by the clearing fell through a fissure in the crust to form a small waterfall with a drop of about 4 meters. It was caught in a jar-shaped stone structure and then flowed over into a stone sink. They had carried over their pots and other dishes to clean them, but...

*...That's probably the last of the Hexagone Française transport ships flying overhead.*

Everyone in the clearing would have seen it as well.

As had Mary, Naito, Naruze, and Naomasa here.

"In other words, Houjou and Oda forces will be joining an England-class battlefield the day after tomorrow, right?"

"At IZUMO, we had to fight to protect the Musashi, but what will it be like this time?"

"This time, we will probably be the ones attacking their fortress." Tenzou mentally pictured the Houjou land that would likely be used as the battlefield. "Odawara Castle is a large, flat castle. The inside is divided into several enclosed circles, so it will not be an easy place to attack."

"Circles?" asked Mary.

*...Oh, she looks so cute holding up that washed plate as an example circle.*

But giving a proper answer was what mattered.

"In Far Eastern terminology, a defensive enclosure of a castle is known as a circle."

**Hori-ko:** "In that case, Tenzou-sama, you just repeated yourself by saying it is divided into enclosed enclosures, didn't you?"

**Me:** "I can see why Mary was confused."

**Novice:** "Yes, you do sometimes see people who try to simplify things with precise terminology and end up tripping over it."

**Mal-Ga:** "Huh? I take it you've been looking in the mirror then?"

**Novice:** "No. You didn't understand me? I was talking about people who rejoice in using obscure and confusing language."

**Four Eyes:** "Yes, I know exactly what you mean. Just take a look at this book I bought at the last event: 'The black shade strength became a dark force and clouded the shadow man's mind with a grim power, drawing out his latent potential.' Wouldn't 'the shadow man became pathetic' work just as well? Right? Is there something wrong with your brain?"

**Novice:** "It was meant to represent his fall into darkness! Can't you just admit it sounds cool!?"

Tenzou could have sworn Mary said "Oh, so he was feeling himself down below?", but he decided he must have misheard.

**Hori-ko:** "But saying things in needlessly confusing ways was a problem my father had as well. I have determined I should live a more straightforward life."

**Asama:** "H-Horizon, you're plenty straightforward already, so you'll be fine!"

"Anyway," said Tenzou, thankful the enemies' aim had been diverted elsewhere. "Odawara Castle had already prepared a flood water source at the peninsula's mountains above it. They should already be flooding the castle for our attack."

"They can do that?" asked Naomasa while polishing some ironware.

"Judge." Tenzou nodded. "If they flood the castle in advance, then the attackers will be forced to use that. It would be possible to send in even more water, but since the flooding will be complete without that, I believe it saves us a lot of trouble as the attackers."

"And the defenders will be prepared for exactly what happens, so they can

stay safe, right?" asked Mary.

"Precisely."

Tenzou nodded and realized that Mary's execution had also been a form of "self harm" her country had needed to perform in advance of the Armada Battle.

Even with control of the self-harm, Houjou's flooding would still require submerging a large tract of land.

"Now, then. ...Even if they industrialize that well, some people will still be harmed by it."

With that comment, he placed a washed plate on the stack being made on the stone step beyond the sink.

Then he reached for the next plate.

"Ah."

Mary had done the exact same thing to his right, so their fingers tangled together.

Tenzou felt the mutual touching switch inside him activate.

*...Th-this is a rare situation!*

Naomasa had her back to them while polishing the ironware. She breathed out a long stream of smoke from her kiseru, but she ignored them.

And Mary switched from her left hand to her right as she grabbed his hand.

They picked up a plate with their doubled right hands.

*Eh?* he thought as Mary circled behind him. She kept her hand on the plate and lightly embraced him from behind.

"Master Tenzou?"

*..Boooooooooobs!!*

"Yes?" he replied.

**Gold Mar:** "Oh, he's really shaken."

**10ZO:** "I am not. I am perfectly calm."

But while Mary embraced him from behind...

"When washing a round, Western-style plate, you need to do it like this, Master Tenzou."

She set down her scrubbing brush and took his hand. She did the same with the plate.

"Western plates come in a few different shapes, but these ones used to serve curry are flat in the center."

The way she pressed her chest into his back through her track suit was clearly squashing them.

"...Yes, I can definitely feel the flat center!"

"Yes, they're flat."

*...I'm so glad Mary-dono doesn't worry much about the nuance of what I say!*

And Mary said, "With greasy foods, a stain tends to remain in the seam between the flat part and the curved part. Because the spoon and other utensils will often hit there and scrape it. So focus on that seam."

The way Mary moved while speaking rubbed her squashed chest against his back more than he had expected. Just when he thought they were going to squish out in an unexpected direction, they would slide a bit. Beyond just the heat of the pressure, the way the edge seemed to roll around felt ticklish.

"I-it is indeed important to focus on the seam!"

"Judge. But you need to pay careful attention, Master Tenzou."

"Y-you mean I should focus on them even more than this!?"

**Silver Wolf:** "And with that I just realized what's really going on. This has reversed my opinion of the 1st Special Duty Officer here, so what should I do?"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. Why don't you do the same thing with my foolish brother, Mitotsudaira!? 'Ohhh, my king? Today let's polish up these ultra-flat plates.' C'mon, c'mon! Oh! Asama! You bring your extra-large bowls too! They need a good washing!"

**Asama:** "Honestly... Mito, please don't say things that will spread the damage

to me."

**Silver Wolf:** "That wasn't me!"

At any rate, Kimi's actions had diverted their aim.

Mary hummed while holding his hand and polishing the plate.

"Even a clean plate will get damage. And it will be small enough that the people using it don't notice," she said. "You only notice once it's dirty, so you have to be thorough when cleaning."

"...Mary-dono." said Tenzou. "So if someone who knows the plate well washes it, it can be made nice and clean?"

"Judge, that's right."

"Then," he said. "Even if it has stains or scars, we can still call it a beautiful plate."

Mary trembled a bit when he said that. And after a while...

"J-judge...!"

The heat on his back grew.

"Thank you very much." There was a bitter smile in her voice as she whispered from below his ear. "But a plate is just a plate. I am not trying to say I am actually pretty."

"I am not saying you are a plate either."

"My." The bitterness left her smile. "Then what do you say I am?"

*...Oh, no!*

If she was not a plate, what was she?

Tenzou had not expected this question.

He had thought she would simply agree and that would be the end of it. But...

*...This is not good!*

*I got carried away and responded in sexy ninja mode. I need to be more*

*careful.*

But for now, how was he supposed to answer that question?

**Unturning:** "Should I be looking forward to this answer?"

**10ZO:** "Eh!? Do you have to raise the hurdle like that!?"

**Novice:** "C'mon, just say it: 'Mary-dono, you are like an emerald that will continue to shine for a billion lightyears.' "

**Four Eyes:** "If you're honestly that stupid and you weren't just trying to make him look stupid, you really need to think about what you've done. Oh, but if you are that stupid, you wouldn't know what it was you did wrong. What a conundrum..."

**Novice:** "Stop making assumptions...!"

**Asama:** "But, Tenzou-kun, saying she's like a jewel is a good idea! Oh, but you need to say something better than what I could come up with. I mean, she's an English princess and her sister is pretty strict."

**10ZO:** "And now you're raising the hurdle three levels at once!?"

**Silver Wolf:** "H-how about going for one of the curveballs you're so well known for?"

**Wise Sister:** "Meat! Meat, right!? That's what you mean, Mitotsudaira! Something like 'Mary-dono, you are just like a marbled sirloin'."

**Silver Wolf:** "Oh, but I have heard the name sirloin came from Mary's father Henry VIII thinking the beef loin he was eating was so delicious it deserved the title of sir. But sirloin was originally spelled 'surloine', so that's thought to be apocryphal."

**10ZO:** "Can you stop sounding helpful but ultimately being entirely useless!?"

There was nothing he could do. But then a thought occurred to him.

*...Can't I just get out of this with something abstract like, "Mary-dono, you are the most important thing in the world"?*

**Mal-Ga:** "Oh, I guess I'll be nice and point out that it's game over if you just say she's 'important' or 'irreplaceable'."

**Gold Mar:** "Yeah. At times like this, you want a clear comparison to something beautiful, not some imaginary thing that everyone will picture differently."

**Marube-ya:** "Money! It's gotta be money! That's something beautiful that can make any dream come true!"

**Almost Everyone:** "We didn't need that ugly opinion!!"

**Hori-ko:** "Anyway, we seem to be at an impasse. Now, Tenzou-sama, respond to Mary-samo with your actions instead of your words."

**Wise Sister:** "Push her down and have your way with her!"

**10ZO:** "I can't exactly do that with her chest pressed against my back."

**Me:** "Why not just be true to yourself?"

*In that case,* thought Tenzou.

Mary smiled bitterly as sign frames appeared and disappeared around Tenzou.

Everyone was always quick to cheer him on whenever something happened. Those things would often be encouraging or amusing, but she made a point of not peeking and ruining the surprise Tenzou was preparing for her.

*Besides,* she thought.

*...Even if he gets advice from the others, he always thinks for himself in the very end.*

In a way, everyone's excited comments would go to waste. She did not know if he was making proposals or if he could not relax until he had ruled everything else out by process of elimination, but he always made up his own mind in the end. And...

"Mary-dono."

He moved a bit away from her.

He held her hand in his right so that they raised the plate together.

"I think..."

He then dunked his left hand in the sink. He pulled out some soap bubbles, but he spread them out between his fingers and then lightly squeezed them into a shape.

"...you are like a water lily."

The bubbles had formed a small but definite shape: a flower.

He held it out toward her.

"Oh...um."

She set down her scrubbing brush and accepted it in her wet hand. His hand was wet too, so the bubble flower slid down into hers.

She held it.

It looked like it would fall apart at any moment. In fact, it was slowly losing its shape. But...

"What color?"

"...White."

Mary smiled at his answer.

Tears fell from the corners of her bent eyes.

*...Oh, honestly.*

What she had been so desperate about two months ago felt like happiness now. Did that mean she had lost her sense of tension?

She could only see good things now and she decided it was best to believe that was because there were no more bad things. And as she let the flower melt in her hand...

"I guess I can't wear this one in my hair."

She grabbed his hand with the hand holding the melted flower.

"Master Tenzou, let's get back to the dishes."

This was such a wonderful time. She wished she could experience it a while longer, but now was not the time for that.

As they stood shoulder to shoulder and resumed washing, something

occurred to her.

"Doing the dishes at home doesn't take long at all, but we get to spend more time together when we do everyone's dishes."

**Mal-Ga:** "It would be pretty amazing if he answered that by saying he knows a way they can add another set of dishes in about a year's time."

**Gold Mar:** "Ga-chan, you sound like a dirty old man."

**Flat Vassal:** "Huh? Does that mean the 1st Special Duty Officer always does the dishes with Mary-san?"

**Bell:** "That must be...fun."

**Smoking Girl:** "Kh... S-sorry, some smoke caught in my windpipe...!"

**Novice:** "Oh, the divine network just got a lot livelier."

**10ZO:** "Now who's been leaking our information!?"

*I'm glad everyone is so lively down here and up above,* thought Masazumi as she looked to the southern sky.

She used a telescope spell to view the Houjou sky. Her sign frame listed the routes taken by the Hexagone Française ships and an estimated cargo list based on their speed and inertial momentum around corners.

And based on that information...

*...I guess we can assume they don't have any gods of war.*

*But,* she added to caution her thoughts.

**Vice President:** "Neshinbara, what kind of forces can we expect from Houjou?"

**Novice:** "Thankfully, their main force is made up of automatons and gods of war. They have enough of those that Mouri wouldn't have to bring any of their own."

**Vice President:** "I need to speak with the Satomi Student Council President

once we're back on the Musashi."

**Asama:** "Should I contact her now?"

**Vice President:** "No, we're on our study camp at the moment. Even if the history recreation takes precedence over school events, we only just counted our investigation of the ruins as a Sanada history recreation, so I want to avoid anything that will get us criticism about political this or diplomatic that."

**Asama:** "Then I'll just send her a divine mail. That doesn't set a definite time period for a response, so we can always claim Yoshy-chan was just being considerate when she answered now."

*Yeah, I guess we can do that,* thought Masazumi, realizing how new to a lot of this she was.

She let Asama arrange the divine mail and send it out via Tsukinowa.

"Anyway." Masazumi took a breath. "This will be the last day of our stay in Sanada."

She looked down to the tables set up around the weakening campfire. Mitotsudaira was eating a large piece of chicken while Adele and some others were setting up a hotpot.

They still intended to enjoy this for a while longer.

# **Chapter 6: Viewer at an Observation Point**

## 第六章

### 『見晴らし場の望み人』



呼びかけの聲は遠くに  
呼ばれたい心は近くに  
配点 (行き場所)

*The calling voice is distant*

*The heart wishing to be called is near*

### **Point Allocation (Somewhere To Go)**

"Hey, everyone."

Masazumi called out to the group gathered by the campfire.

The first to turn around was Asama who was managing the fire's intensity. She had lowered the fire's setting in preparation for the next morning, but now she tilted her head.

"What is it, Masazumi?"

In the night sky above, the moons were moving into the west and the heat was gradually rising and vanishing.

Eight giant white and black ships hung in the sky and even the campfire's heat was fading in the forest clearing.

Masazumi put her hands on her hips as she viewed that fire.

"I'd like to start the next meeting before long, but listen. It would be best to head back to our base camp sooner rather than later, right?"

"Eh!? Masazumi, isn't it a little soon for that!? We need to enjoy our late-night snacks a while longer!"

Mitotsudaira turned around while eating a large piece of cooked chicken at the table next to the weakened campfire.

Mitotsudaira frantically held up her large chicken skewer.

"And we haven't prepared tomorrow's breakfast yet. Wrapping meat in leaves and placing it in the embers while dreaming of tomorrow morning is a crucial event!"

If possible, she wanted to delay the meeting and put off having to return to their base camp.

After all, that was where the tent she shared with her king and the others was.

That in and of itself was not a problem. *What is wrong with a knight serving her king? Yes, this is a good thing. It is the proper way of things.* However...

*...My mother is here!*

There was no real problem with her king and Horizon who were viewing the night sky through a telescope with Persona-kun and some others, but then there was her mother. She had yet to inform her mother that she was sleeping in the same tent as her king.

"...And she is going to have a field day with that one..."

She had no doubt about that. It was an absolute. You could call it a universal truth.

Her mother was sure to say "My!", climb into the tent, secure her own spot, try to sleep in the nude, tease Mitotsudaira, and attempt something with Mitotsudaira's king.

In fact, he had been marked by her in the past.

*...I cannot allow that to happen a second time!*

She had to protect her king from her mother.

After all, her king generally put up no defenses whatsoever.

That was why Mitotsudaira was setting up some preemptive defenses by taking time to cook the full supply of meat she had brought with her.

By using up their time here, her mother would have less time for her field day.

So...

"I-isn't it a fantastic dream? Just imagine the wonderful aroma when we dig this up near the campfire tomorrow morning!"

"What a weird dream. ...But anyway." Masazumi lightly pointed into the southern sky. "We've gone over most everything about the current situation and we know most everything that's going on at Houjou thanks to the observations from the Musashi. We want to return to the Musashi as quickly as

possible tomorrow, so it would be best to complete the next meeting soon."

"That's right," said Mitotsudaira's mother from a log chair near the campfire. "We barely exchanged any information at all in our earlier discussion."

Mitotsudaira agreed with her mother. She might not be able to avoid the meeting, but...

"R-right!? We should exchange a whole lot more information, shouldn't we!?"

"But Hexagone Française Vice Chancellor...to be blunt, you're here."

When she heard Masazumi's comment, Mitotsudaira spread her mouth horizontally and gasped.

*...That's right! My mother will be Musashi's enemy!*

She was not just the enemy of her and her king's morals.

The battle had yet to officially begin, but her mother would eventually be their enemy.

However, her mother lightly waved her right hand back and forth with a smile.

"That isn't a problem. The only thing about the battle we could discuss would be making requests for who duels who in Odawara Castle's central circle. And discussing our strategic intentions only makes it easier to make peace afterwards." She shrugged. "Besides, if you're being this cautious, my mere presence here will keep you from making any kind of plans and then you would end up losing. ...Or are you planning to find a way to keep me out of a closed-room meeting once we arrive on the Musashi?"

"Mother...couldn't you just leave?"

"Eh? But I don't have a ship."

Adele raised her hand and smiled as if she already knew the answer.

"Um... Just out of curiosity, how did you get here?"

"Testament." The mother smiled. "From above to below."

"You jumped down, didn't you!? You must have! Did you even use a descent spell?"

"What are you talking about, Nate? A small height like that is perfectly normal."

Mitotsudaira was at a loss for words when her mother placed a hand on her cheek and smiled.

**Sticky King:** "Mitotsudaira's mother also jumped down from IZUMO, didn't she?"

**Hori-ko:** "Now Mitotsudaira-sama needs to show off what she can do."

**Silver Wolf:** "It sure would be convenient if I could do that..."

She did not remember it since she had been unconscious at the time, but her mother had to have been carrying her king during that jump at IZUMO.

*...Her physical ability is downright nonsensical.*

Meanwhile, Masazumi tightly crossed her arms.

"Hmm," she groaned.

**Vice President:** "Oh, I've mostly made up my mind already. This is just a show for the Reine des Garous, so don't worry, okay?"

**Hori-ko:** "Judge. I assumed you were trying to come up with another highly destructive pun."

**Vice President:** "Well, this is the werewolf queen, so maybe something about how she and her daughter seem more like hair-wolves than werewolves? ...What? You can laugh if you want."

**Me:** "Now she's trying to force it!"

But Masazumi took a breath and faced Mitotsudaira's mother.

"Our general plans are as we mentioned earlier. And we can say a lot more tomorrow, so there's no need to rush things here."

However...

"I would like to exchange some information on what's happening elsewhere and around us. ...Would you be willing to do that?"

Masazumi stopped there.

*...I see.*

That was a topic where their position as enemies or allies was irrelevant.

They would be exchanging information either unrelated to their battle or that would have no effect on their battle.

Everyone must have understood that because a brief silence fell.

Then a voice joined the quiet crackling of firewood.

"That is an excellent decision." Mitotsudaira's mother smiled. "And I do have one additional piece of information for you. ...Earlier in southern Paris, an Hexagone Française mercenary corps took independent action. It brought down a Hashiba supply fleet. And," she said. "The Genbu of the Four Sacred Beast gods of war was apparently seen there."

When she heard those words via divine transmission while she polished the ironware, Naomasa looked up into the sky.

The polishing rag she was using had sesame oil soaking it. That fragrance did not seem to suit the refreshing night air.

But as if to hold that fragrance up into that air, she held the polished iron pot in the moonlight to check on its shine.

**Smoking Girl:** "Urquiaga, which one of us will deal with that?"

**Uqui:** "I will fight alongside Narumi. Who gets sent where will be up to Neshin-...up to someone else."

**Novice:** "Heh. Looks like I've been requested by name."

**Laborer:** "Why would you interpret it that way?"

**Novice:** "Experience! It's all about experience!"

**Mal-Ga:** "Not that it matters, but you two are hard to tell apart right next to each other."<sup>[3]</sup>

*I was thinking the same thing,* silently added Naomasa.

*...I guess I'll have to figure out something if I'm going to have definite anti-god*

*of war equipment...*

The Suzaku primarily fought hand-to-hand, but that was because she specialized in martial arts. It was too late for her to start learning how to use a sword or spear, so she had made the right decision there.

However, long-distance attacks were the standard in aerial battles.

And using weapons was the standard even in ground battles.

With Michiyuki Byakko's striking power or a technique like its Roar Deterioration, she would be able to power through such things, but that was not how the Suzaku worked.

And she did not have free use of its Four Sacred Beast acceleration.

*...Would a rifle be my best bet?*

That had worked well against the Shirasagi.

Asama's spell had handled the targeting while the Suzaku performed the actions needed to fire on the targeted location.

She had learned how to control the Suzaku more precisely and that had made good use of that knowledge. But...

"...I guess I can't fight an enemy god of war with a sniper rifle."

"What about using homing rounds like we do?"

That came from the Technohexen who were washing pots and iron plates behind her.

It was true there were homing rounds like the ones they used, but in that case...

"I'd be helpless in a close-range battle. A Musashi god of war needs to be able to fight both ground and aerial battles. I could always select different equipment depending on the circumstances, but the homing rounds would only be useful in aerial battles. Not to mention that my opponent would use them too."

And to be blunt...

"The Suzaku still isn't familiar enough with the sky to fight an aerial battle

with a rifle."

"Have you been doing any flight training?"

She had been doing some ever since IZUMO.

She could fly alongside the Musashi just fine, but an actual battle would be difficult.

The difficulty of pulling off the movements was part of it, but...

"It's hard on me as well."

"Do you not place any gravitational control buffering on yourself, Masa-yan?"

"When I do that on Suzaku's shoulder, the buffering changes can't keep up with Suzaku's movements and sometimes I'm nearly swept right off."

Naomasa finished checking the shine of the pot's surface. There was no oil on the edge, so she lowered it and wiped it down again. The Schwarz Hexen reflected in the bottom of the pot held an iron plate up toward her.

"You're the type that won't do anything until it's perfect, aren't you?"

"Oh, so she's a lot like me?" asked Naito.

"No," said Naruze. "In Naomasa's case, she doesn't let the reasons pile up. She doesn't think about it at the preparation phase like you do, Margot. ...She simply lists off the negative reasons for something and then gives up."

That was actually fairly accurate.

*...Well, I've built my daily life out of the things that survived that process, which makes things easy.*

Everyone had a lot of things they cared about, but they would have far fewer things they truly cared about.

She had simply kept those things nearby and gotten used to it.

She had had the luxury to fortify herself with only the thing she truly cared about and view everything else as extraneous.

...Then again...

She had to be changing somewhat since she was actively trying to get

involved in the fighting.

**Smoking Girl:** "Since we'd be fighting Hashiba, there's a good chance those weird gods of war we saw in Novgorod would be there. Me, Urquiaga, Narumi, and... I guess Yoshiyasu would have to stay on the front line to deal with them."

**Tonbokiri:** "Could I join that battle as well?"

**Silver Wolf:** "I could fight against them well enough too, so I could help."

**Wise Sister:** "What about you, Asama?"

**Asama:** "Eh!? Oh, um, if we're talking about gods of war, well, I can get away with it a bit. I already did that at Novgorod. You know, say the impact arrows are for disarming them."

Tenzou made a quiet comment while washing dishes at the sink.

"I just felt an incredible wave of relief wash over me..."

**Smoking Girl:** "Then is there any point in me fighting too?"

**Asama:** "I can't fire all *that* many anti-god of war shots in a row."

**Novice:** "And the enemy would not deploy gods of war anywhere near where Asama-kun is."

**Hori-ko:** "That would be where negotiating over our requests for the battlefield layout comes into play."

**Me:** "Ah! Then I could invent a new tactic where I crossdress as a busty black-haired shrine maiden so they think I'm Asama!"

**Wise Sister:** "That's right, foolish brother! Odawara will see the debut of a stylish crossdressing tactic where you disguise yourself as Asama and hide the real one behind you! Then you can let the real one step out while you yell 'Bwahhhh! It was me all alooong!' "

*What's the point of that?*

**Flat Vassal:** "But, but. Doesn't that mean we're safe as long as we're near Asama-san?"

"Hee hee," laughed Mary as she washed the dishes. "We're safe near you as well, Adele."

*Yeah, she is a shield...* silently agreed Naomasa.

As for the others and those above...

**Uqui:** "So if we have both Asama and Adele with us, we'll be safe?"

**Me:** "Would Adele be in front?"

**Silver Wolf:** "But then Tomo can't shoot."

**Wise Sister:** "Oh, she'll still shoot."

**Flat Vassal:** "P-please stop this! I just felt my butt shudder!"

**Asama:** "And why are you continuing this conversation without me!?"

*Isn't that the usual way of things?* thought Naomasa.

But the others had accepted her suggestion like normal.

She knew they would not forget about it and she was thankful for that. Basically, they would make use of what she said without looking into the reasons behind it too much.

*...The Four Sacred Beasts, hm?*

During the negotiations with Oushuu and Sviet Rus, her job had been to protect the Musashi, so she had not been involved with the Seiryu.

If the Suzaku reacted when she met another of the Four Sacred Beasts, would her sister wake up again?

No, she could not say that had actually been her sister during the battle with the Byakko. In her opinion, that had to have been the ether revealing her sister's 'mold'. But...

"Well, that doesn't matter."

Naomasa called out to Masazumi over the divine transmission.

"If Hashiba does use one of the Four Sacred Beasts, we can handle it. ...You know what I mean, don't you?"

*What she means?* wondered Asama with a mental tilt of the head.

*...Is Masa saying she'll use the Suzaku to fight the Genbu?*

**Mal-Ga:** "Is she going to get her god of war all destroyed again?"

**Marube-ya:** "Before, we would bet on whether Masa would get her Suzaku destroyed, but lately everyone's figured out that she doesn't do that when she's using a rifle. Oh, but that wasn't the case against the Terrestrial Dragon, so there was a lot of money flying around then."

**Azuma:** "I'm impressed she can get it fixed so quickly."

**Smoking Girl:** "That's because I use cheap spare parts. IZUMO's internal brand MINO makes them for export, but I buy them direct before they're exported."

*...Our shrine is the one that arranges that, isn't it?*

Shinto managed all of the Far East's infrastructure and distribution.

While the merchants could only trade with neighboring nations, Shinto could sell to the entire Far East as a network of shrines.

They were of course limited to selling Shinto products, but since IZUMO was the head of Shinto, IZUMO products could be sold and distributed to any part of the Shinto network.

Naomasa's Suzaku was the same.

**Smoking Girl:** "I use the commercial female heavy god of war parts that have high heat and cold resistance. Although I do expand on that by adding a few parts to the frame to make it bigger."

**Tachibana Wife:** "You mean those talons weren't just to make it look cool?"

**Smoking Girl:** "Those are for moving around on the ship. They catch on the height differences and hold points."

**Novice:** "Eh...? They're for something so boring...?"

**Four Eyes:** "Because she isn't a child."

But those two were cut off by Masazumi.

**Vice President:** "In other words, she is a very grounded individual."

Asama took those words at face value.

But after about 7 seconds of silence from the others, it hit her.

**Asama:** "Oh! That was meant as a joke that continued the criticism of Neshinbara-kun!"

**Vice President:** "Don't explain it!"

**Hori-ko:** "Masazumi-sama, that one may have been too subtle."

"Wait!"

Toori waved at them from where he had been doing some astronomical observation.

He was now wearing a long-haired black wig he had gotten from somewhere.

"Seijun has finally escaped the narrow confines of her own empty jokes and instead started poking fun at others! Did you hear that!? She made it a joke at someone else's expense, but she still managed to make it an empty joke trapped in her own little world! She hasn't changed at all, but I think we should all applaud her effort."

Horizon swung her lower leg to kick Toori right in the butt.

The idiot briefly hung in the air in a seated position, and then...

"Wh-what was that for!?"

"Why are you trying to sound like a girl, Toori-sama?"

"W-well, I felt like you'd nearly turned me into one there. But whatever. ...So, Seijun, can you sum up what we're talking about?"

"I can," said Masazumi with a nod.

She looked to the Reine des Garous who was seated next to the campfire between them.

"The Reine des Garous's information about Hashiba having one of the Four Sacred Beast gods of war will be useful after the Siege of Odawara. Because we'll be up against them at Sekigahara or the Osaka Campaign."

So...

"If we are to utilize that information, we must succeed at the Siege of

Odawara."

*That's true*, thought Asama.

She turned toward the Reine des Garous and everyone else did the same.

And that incarnation of volume responded to their gazes.

"I hate to interrupt your discussion, but do you have a moment?"

She gave a quick wink to Asama.

*...Eh?*

Asama had no idea what this was about, but the woman's nose twitched as everyone tilted their heads.

"Excuse me, but you have the same adorable scent as my daughter."

"What scent...would that be?"

The Reine des Garous stood up.

She took half a step. They were farther apart than that, yet the woman still covered the distance. Was it a special way of walking or carrying her body? Regardless, she leaned in close enough to bite Asama's left ear and whispered to her.

"It's a scent that says 'I want to be with you', so it caught my attention."

Asama just about asked "with who?" on reflex.

"Ah."

But she saw Mitotsudaira beyond the volume.

She was holding her hand horizontally flat and lowering it over and over. The gesture probably meant "calm down".

**Asama:** "Okay. Okay, Mito!"

**Silver Wolf:** "Find a way to dodge the issue! Before it spreads to me!"

Mitotsudaira seemed to have some kind of serious problem to deal with, so...

**Asama:** "Mito, I'm sorry."

**Silver Wolf:** "Eh?"

Asama gave the Reine des Garous a smile and then spoke.

"You must be noticing your own scent. Mito told me how well you get along with her father."

"Oh, well said."

The parent smiled.

And she moved her cheek in close.

*Eh?* thought Asama as several warning sign frames appeared around her. This was the loup-garou queen and Hexagone Française's representative. Since she was a mystical creature and had powerful ether, she was a dangerous person to have so close.

Asama felt it was rude, but she did not have the focus to spare on closing the sign frames.

The Reine des Garous had no interest in criticizing her and in fact instantly assessed the varieties of sign frames.

"You're looking at this at an impressive level."

With that, she sniffed Asama. She did it a second and third time on the right side of her face.

"Oh, this scent."

That reminded Asama of something.

She had been facing left.

In the tent the night before, they had pretended to sleep after he woke up.

And after that, it was this cheek that had used his arm as a pillow.

The Reine des Garous then moved right up in front of Asama's face. That naturally placed something in front of her eyes.

*...She's so big...*

*And not her height. Her boobs.*

Asama viewed that size while she let the Reine des Garous sniff her.

*...Oh, I know what this is.*

Comparatively speaking, this had to be how Adele felt when looking at her.

Yet as she stared at the Reine des Garous...

**Asama:** "I don't feel the urge to say anything like Adele always does to Kimi and me..."

**Flat Vassal:** "That's because it's not as depressing when you already have some for yourself! There's a huge difference between starting with nothing and starting with something!"

**Silver Wolf:** "I-I would say I'm starting with *something*, but I'm still feeling that urge!"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. As the Boobs Brahmin at the top of the boobs caste, it can be hard to understand the suffering of the Boobs Shudra."

**Hori-ko:** "Caste-wise, I would be a Boobs Kshatriya, which I believe should be abbreviated as boo-ya."

*Is that how it works?* But once Asama thought about it, it actually worked out pretty well since a shrine maiden like her was a Brahmin and a royal like Horizon was a Kshatriya.

**Asama:** "No, wait. That doesn't work with Mito."

**Silver Wolf:** "Um? Tomo? What doesn't work with me?"

But during that exchange...

"—————"

She was licked on the forehead.

It was a small action. It only elicited an "Oh?" from those who noticed. But...

"Mother...! What are you doing!?"

"Oh? But Nate, I'm giving you an advantage here."

Asama could not even guess what that meant.

*...How does Mito's mom licking me give Mito an advantage?*

But Mito seemed opposed to this.

"Tomo! H-hurry down to the washing station, scrub your face with a face-washer, dry off with a towel, go to my king, and rub your forehead on him!"

"I shouldn't be so confused after you gave that much detail!"

"Judge." Horizon raised her right hand while sweating. "Has Mitotsudaira-sama finally joined Asama-sama in crazy town?"

"You're saying I was already crazy, aren't you!? Aren't you!?"

But then she heard laughter.

It was the Reine des Garous. She turned toward Horizon and then Toori next to her. He was using a hand mirror to check how his black wig looked.

"What do you think, Nate Maman? Does it look good on me?"

"Yes, such things look far better on you than I would have guessed."

"Good, good," he said.

She smiled back at him and then returned to her seat. She then glanced over at Asama.

"You have a wonderful scent. ...When two people are together enough for their scents to permeate each other, the result is twice as rich."

"I see..."

*Is that how it works?* was her only thought. She tried surreptitiously sniffing her shoulder, but she could not detect anything other than the perfume she was wearing.

Then the Reine des Garous lightly swept her hair through the night air.

"I more or less understand your connections now since that method is much more informative than asking through words. It seems your connections are fairly complex, but..."

She looked to Toori and Horizon.

"That king and her are at the center, aren't they?"

The Reine des Garous was glad she had come her tonight.

*...That scent won't be as clear once they reach the Musashi tomorrow.*

They were out in nature. In a forest. This was an unfamiliar land, but it was filled with scents familiar to a wolf's nose. It was the best environment for picking up an individual's scent and selecting particular aspects of it.

Her daughter's king had several scents on him, but those of his sister and the Musashi princess next to him were quite strong. But her daughter and the shrine representative girl's scents were just as strong. Much fainter was the ninja's. *Yes, this is most likely the scent of that ninja that visited our home before.*

*...And there are many more like that.*

He must have gone to many lands, met many people, and seen many battlefields.

And that was sure to continue.

"As long as you don't give up, you will conquer the world, won't you?"

"Yeah, and that's how we'll gather Horizon's emotions and figure something out about the Apocalypse. We'll also figure something out about the world's other problems. Isn't that right, Seijun?"

"Judge. That is correct. Well said, Aoi. Gold star. ...C'mon, everyone, tell him what a good job he did."

"Wh-what are you, an elementary school teacher!? Wait, you are, aren't you!? I lose this round!"

"Oh, Toori-sama, that was an unexpected ending to that one. Gold star. ...Now, everyone, tell him what a good job he did."

"Noooo! Don't respond to my gags with scattered applause instead of laughter!"

Nevertheless, they all applauded with fake smiles. It seemed to be some kind of ritual, so the Reine des Garous joined in. And once her daughter's king began swinging around an imaginary sword, the Musashi Vice President cleared her throat.

She slowly turned toward the Reine des Garous.

"Reine des Garous, I will now give you some secret Musashi information."

Meaning...

"Is it something we and the other nations are not yet aware of?"

"Yes." The Musashi Vice President placed her right hand on her hip and her left on her chest. "To be honest, this is an idea I have kept hidden in my heart, so it has yet to be reviewed by the Treasurer, Secretary, 1st Special Duty Officer, or 'Musashi'. That means I still don't know how practical it is, but..."

"Let me hear it. I can decide how meaningful it is."

"I appreciate it," replied the girl without relaxing her expression.

However, the Asama Shrine Representative took action by opening a sign frame.

"I'll set up a barrier to block both sound and images. You can speak after that, Masazumi."

For just a moment, a slight wind seemed to surround the meeting space. Then they heard a sound like the wind blowing through bamboo leaves.

"Masazumi, you can speak now."

"Judge. Thank you."

"Oh, it's nothing," said the Asama Shrine Representative with a bit of a smile. The Reine des Garous had a thought as she watched that girl.

.../ see.

These were powerful people.

This group, including her daughter, was not just here because they were classmates.

They also had their camaraderie of the powerful.

The Reine des Garous thought, *This is a strange sort of battle formation.*

When she had smelled the Asama Shrine Representative earlier, she had detected the scents of her daughter's king, his sister, her daughter herself, and

Far Eastern cooking. It had all been overlaid on the uniquely transparent scent of purification. However...

*...She must be as close to their king as Nate is.*

The Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Special Duty Officers were also here.

A look around showed the others here also tended to be on the front line or holding important points in the combat records. Since the former imperial crown prince was also here, the entire class had to be the center of Musashi.

Were they elites?

What she did know was that the powerful leaders of various fields had gathered around her daughter's king.

This was a little different from the situation in Hexagone Française.

The members of her nation's main force all belonged to the academy, but they were divided into different classes based on combat style or occupation, making it all feel more like guilds. That was why they formed organizations where they could "gather", such as the Student Council or Chancellor's Officers.

That had the advantage of not restricting interaction between school year and of helping maintain the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers as organizations. Most nations did not have an age restriction for students and that meant some people would hold an office for a long period of time. This was meant to ease some of the problems that would cause.

If they did try to shove everyone into a single class like this one, there would be issues with school year differences and combat style differences. After all, Hexagone Française was beginning the history recreation of their national army, so they strictly divided their classes between combat style so they could train separately.

*...If we do all need to gather, we just use the rooms for the Student Council or Chancellor's Officers.*

She found it all to be stifling, so she just let everyone do as they pleased. But if she were to join an environment like the one her daughter had...

"Now, then."

Her thoughts were interrupted by the Musashi Vice President.

"Listen, everyone. This isn't something worth bringing up as an official topic at the meeting with Houjou and Mouri tomorrow. It really is that minor, but... I will probably ask all of you to gather some information, so I will say it while I can," she said. "After this battle with Houjou and Mouri, I want to participate in P.A. Oda's actions in some form. I believe we will need to intervene in Nobunaga's assassination at the Honnouji Incident that will probably occur during summer break."

"Why?" asked the Reine des Garous. "Why act during summer break after the Testament Union has forbidden it?"

The Reine des Garous gave a quiet whistle in her heart.

*...That is an excellent decision.*

The Honnouji Incident referred to Nobunaga, head of the Oda clan, dying during an attack by Akechi Mitsuhide, one of his closest aides.

It would happen while Nobunaga lodged in Kyoto's Honnouji temple and it would result in the Oda forces splitting apart in the fight over succession.

After slaying Mitsuhide in revenge, Hashiba would take the lead. Shibata would resist out of respect for the Oda clan, but he would lose to Hashiba's forces in the Battle of Shizugatake.

The incident could be seen as the greatest turning point for Hashiba's later rule.

But why was Musashi, aka Matsudaira, trying to intervene in that?

According to the Testament, Matsudaira was so afraid of a surprise attack from anti-Nobunaga forces that they retreated from the Kawachi region near Kyoto after learning of Nobunaga's death.

Not only could they not get involved, they had to distance themselves from it.

Nevertheless, the Reine des Garous supported the Musashi Vice President's

decision.

*...They have no other choice.*

There was a reason for that.

But it was possible the reason she had in mind was different from the reason the girl had in mind.

Some people would try to be involved in a major historical turning point just for the fun of it. So...

"Well?"

She tried asking.

"Why would a Matsudaira force try to get involved in Nobunaga's assassination?"

The Musashi Vice President reacted to her question.

She gave the woman a calm look. And there was a thin smile on her opened lips. It was not quite a crescent moon, but her lips drew a shallow arc as she formed the words.

"Coups, upheavals, and reorganizations. If they choose to use an interpretation of the Testament descriptions of such events, it is possible they will carry out some major operation."

Meaning...

"The Genesis Project. ...I think that is when P.A. Oda will set their Apocalypse solution in motion."

# **Chapter 7: Debaters around the Fire**

# 第七章

## 『火囲いの議論者達』



歴史の正当性は  
歴史の終わりで  
終わるのだろうか  
配点 (議論)

*Will the legitimacy of history*

*Come to an end*

*When history ends?*

### **Point Allocation (Debate)**

The moonlight falling on the city was swept away by the manmade lights.

This was the nightscape of Paris.

At the center of the large city stood a mansion surrounded by a vast garden and the residences and corporations surrounded that.

The city's buildings were not arranged in orderly rows. They were artlessly arranged back to back in distorted circles that made a clear distinction between districts. Those circles of buildings created a courtyard in the center and were known as blocks.

The spaces between those blocks naturally formed roads. The roads between blocks were known as avenues and were seen as distinct from the normal city streets.

Paris was currently utilizing those avenues.

From the outside moving in, those main avenues had been sealed off.

Since Paris had outer city walls, sealing off the inner avenues transformed the city into a giant maze.

They would be fighting Hashiba in two days' time, so they were installing anti-air cannons and defense barrier projectors at important points throughout the city and also deploying *Lourd de Marionnettes*.

They had no time. Each task led right into another and no amount of materiel felt like enough.

Paris was a city that never slept and, when viewed from outside, it looked like a light installed in the earth.

Then there was further work outside of Paris.

Two construction projects were underway there.

They were building a moat and levees around the city.

"Hey, over here!"

These were large and vast projects. The workers included *Lourd de Marionnettes* as well as...

"Hey! Mr. Big Dragon! Come over here!"

The 6 Terrestrial Dragons that had regrouped with Bernard were assisting the construction.

Dragons.

They were all winged and more than 100 meters long. These ones were capable of walking on two legs. At first, they had been standing at Paris's six vertices to protect the city, but as they watched the progress of construction...

"We can't just sit here and watch, humans..."

...they began to help.

The humans were initially surprised by these giant beings who could quickly break down and push aside the dirt.

"You'll help us!?"

"No, you moron," said the dragon digging by the eastern gate. "You see," he continued. "If you don't win here, this nation is in trouble. To ensure we have a home, we need this nation to uphold the contract from 400 years ago, but if a new power takes over, they would have to decide whether to discard or uphold that contract. We just want things to stay the way they are, so we'd like to avoid any possibility of having to renegotiate things."

"That's right," said the one by the southeastern gate two kilometers away. "M.H.R.R. and Hashiba might say they'll recognize our territory, but Master Bernard says it won't work out that way."

"Why not?" asked one of the tiny people.

"I dunno."

The dragons tilted their long heads.

"I don't really get it myself," said the dragon digging at the southern gate which was closest to the Hashiba forces. "But he says we need to participate in this battle to make it clear that we, the main dragon clan, belong to Europe.

"Oh?" said a member of the transport unit delivering a great quantity of cleared dirt outside the city. His summer uniform's shirt was tied around his waist and he wiped away sweat with a towel. "Because if the Hashiba-controlled M.H.R.R. takes over here, you might be driven out as a Far Eastern group?"

"I'm guessing that's the reason..."

The dragon did not give a clear answer and a female giant responded after arriving with a wine barrel of water. She spoke while accepting a receipt *signe cadre* from the site manager who was half her height.

"That's weird. If you're afraid of being driven out on the Far Eastern side of things, wouldn't Hashiba's recognition of your territory be enough?"

"You'd think so, but Master Bernard says otherwise."

"That's right," said the dragon in charge of the southeastern gate. He groaned to himself while fixing the shape of the earthen wall he was forming with his front legs. "Master Bernard said he would be taking all responsibility onto himself. ...We've got nowhere else to go, so we came here hoping we might be of some use."

"You don't have to worry about that. You're being a lot more than just 'some' help!"

"Yeah!" replied the others, so the dragon nodded.

"I was still a kid 400 years ago and didn't really understand it all, but my dad and the others apparently went around killing all sorts of humans. We would also sometimes crush the ones that came to mess with us in the mountains."

The dragons straightened up and looked to Paris.

"It looks small to us, but it's a lot different from what our parents talked about. I can see why some of us feel so hopelessly behind the times."

"Yeah," said the dragon by the north gate as he casually grabbed and picked up a nearby *Lourd de Marionnette*. He gave the screaming *Lourd de Marionnette* a quick glance. "You react the same as ever, but you've got thinner armor and more weapons than back then."

He set down the *Lourd de Marionnette* and then peered over Paris's wall.

"Hm... How long would it take for me to crush it all on my own? A day maybe?"

As soon as he said that, a wall of light rose high into the sky from the inside of the city wall.

That was an anti-air defense barrier meant to block ultra-massive objects. Some of the barriers seemed to have reacted, so with a rumbling sound, the dragon was hit on the jaw and knocked upwards and backwards.

After a while, he collapsed onto his back.

The earthen wall burst like water spray, the wheat field beyond it was crushed, and a portion of the moat collapsed.

The dragon quickly rolled over and shook his head.

"Ow...! What was that!?"

The other dragons spoke up without even looking his way.

"And there we have someone so far behind the times they don't know about the humans' defense systems."

"A day? You'd never manage it that fast, you iiiidiot."

"If you all know about them, you must've been caught by them too, right!?"

"No, no." The northwestern dragon shook his head. "I heard about them when I guided some lost humans out of the mountains."

"Even when the humans don't change, you still need to find a chance to gather information."

The other dragons also spoke to the people at their feet.

"Oh, you can laugh. Mocking the hopeless and praising the skilled is how we dragons do things. Even you other races can tell when we're hopeless and

there's nothing quite as humiliating as being laughed at by you. So laugh it up. ...Oh, but don't laugh when it's me."

They all laughed at that.

"Dammit." The dragon on the ground hopped to his feet and got back to work. "You'd better remember this."

When he said that, he noticed some glowing smoke leave his mouth.

"Hey, humans. Is there anywhere I can fire a dragon cannon? All this moving around has built up the pressure."

"Why not fire it into the sky?"

"For us, that acts as a signal to other clans. Like saying we're in battle or about to die."

"Okay." The captain in charge of carrying dirt waved to the others. "Then you take a quick break. We'll be over at the dirt pile!"

"Testament!"

The workers sounded tired but motivated. Partially because of the dragons' presence, but also...

"We really are carrying the weight of this nation's history and future on our shoulders, aren't we?"

"But," said the man harvesting some wheat early to make room for the expansions to the moat by the southern gate. He looked up at the dragon shining in the moonlight. "You dragons talk a lot more than I expected."

"Don't your old stories mention people who wandered into the mountains and were given jewels for answering a dragon's riddles? Or that we turn into sages when we get old? Or that we'll guide a cute girl down the mountain?"

"Our bodies are partially supported by the ether from the ley lines, so we put a lot of focus on our territory. So as long as you don't try to mess with our daily lives or territory, we're pretty easy to get along with. Although we do have our pride, so we won't let you get away with making a fool of us."

"Right? It's said we attack and eat people because of all the fighting in the

Germanic part of Europe way back when, but that was only because the cooling climate shifted our territory south. Besides, humans don't even taste good. It's not part of our culture or traditions, so we have no real reason to prey on you." The dragon stared up into the sky. "Generally...we just want a simple life. The elder says we have no ambition, but it's not like we ever leave our territory. Can't we just live normal lives?"

"Right, right," said another. "We're biological, so we'll fall in love when we see a cute girl during spring..."

"You do?"

"Of course. We have a low birth rate, so our breeding desire is pretty strong and you can't exactly call us a refined species. And we'll get depressed when we're rejected. But..."

The dragon breathed out a mist of white ether light as if it was cigarette smoke.

And he looked to the center of Paris.

"That's just for us Terrestrial Dragons. The Celestial ones are different," he said. "Celestial Dragons apparently have the same 'mold' as us, but we're biological. We're living creatures, right? But they're more like spirits or gods. They don't need to eat and only do it for the flavor and they don't have kids, so they have very little 'desire' either for breeding or food. If there is a desire they have..."

"Yeah?" asked the man digging up the trees alongside the original moat so they could be moved. "What desire do the Celestial Dragons have?"

"Well." The dragon looked over the outer wall and into Paris. "Celestial Dragons simply have a desire to be a 'dragon'. Did you know? The words like dragon and drachen originally referred to 'a harsh temperament'. That's what the Celestial Dragons are. They're like a living lecture to us Terrestrial Dragons."

The dragons' voices reached into the city.

But when they passed the city walls, they changed into something like the

roaring of wind.

The audio-related defense barriers were being tested at low power.

So while the people inside could see the dragons moving and the outdoor lamps swayed back and forth, they could not hear the cacophony of work noises.

The ground would sometimes shake from construction along the wall, but it was the noise inside Paris that took precedence there.

Inside the city, Paris's streets were under construction.

It was mostly turning the city into a maze by sealing off the avenues and building internal levees just in case. They were also setting up and reinforcing anti-air equipment.

*Lourd de Marionnettes* walked to their posts on the main avenues and plazas, but...

"Southern District 1! We're activating the stealth along the primary avenue! This will take 4 minutes!"

With that, a wall appeared along the avenue. It was a thin wall of ether light with an arched roof.

Viewed from outside, it displayed the scene on the inside, but...

"Ohh."

The people and *Lourd de Marionnettes* on the avenue disappeared.

By using stealth while moving and taking up positions, they could hide the arrangement of their *Lourd de Marionnettes* and other major equipment. Even if Hashiba was observing them from the sky, the locations of most things would be unclear.

And someone watched it happen from an elevated position.

It was the Roi-Soleil who stood on the roof of the mansion in Paris's center that acted as his palace.

"Tomorrow, we will activate stealth barriers around the entire city, preventing anyone outside from detecting anything on the inside. Paris truly is a

battlefield toy box. Don't you think, Bernard?"

"Dragons have no use for toys."

That comment came from an elderly man wearing old armor over a bluish-black summer uniform.

That was Bernard and he gave the Roi-Soleil a sidelong glance with his bestial eyes.

"It would seem the construction is going well thanks to the help from us dragons."

"Heh. We would have finished by tomorrow night even without you. ...But thanks to your help, we should finish by tomorrow morning."

"Any reason for hastening it?"

"So we can rest and enjoy ourselves."

The Roi-Soleil puffed his chest out with pride.

He was looking far to the south where a certain silhouette was visible.

That was the Azuchi Castle.

That ship had split apart for the Great Return and created a line leading south, so he was seeing the first central ship.

"The enemy is already looking beyond their battle with us. Bernard, what is your opinion of that? For example, what will things be like tomorrow?"

"Well." Bernard took a step back on the roof to stand on the highest point and look around. "Roi-Soleil, do you think Hashiba is going to begin their flooding tomorrow?"

"Hashiba takes things seriously. And she intends to turn this into their Invasion of Mouri. We, on the other hand, are trying to view it as a portion of the Thirty Years' War, as are the surrounding nations I'm sure."

"Why?"

"Testament." The Roi-Soleil nodded. "M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda take the history recreation very seriously. They are prepared to make interpretations, but they have never even once chosen to not recreate something in the Testament

descriptions. In a way, they are the most faithful to the Testament Union even as they defy it."

"What does *that* matter?"

"Because it is *that*, Bernard." The Roi-Soleil laughed quietly and did not bother turning back toward Bernard. "Heh. Think of it in reverse, Bernard. You are the mercenary captain who is originally from M.H.R.R. but, being Protestant, constantly defied the Catholic mainstream of M.H.R.R. ...When you inherited that name, weren't you taught that it was joining a foreign nation that proved how seriously he took his actions as a Landsknecht who would turn on his own nation for the right price and contract?"

"Well..."

Bernard seemed to realize something because he looked to the south.

He faced the same direction as the Roi-Soleil to view the Azuchi Castle's silhouette.

The lights of Paris made the distant Azuchi difficult to make out, but Bernard spoke quietly as he stared at it.

"Are you suggesting they have a reason to carry out the history recreation so seriously?"

"They probably do." The Roi-Soleil did not make a definite statement, but he did put his hands on his hips. "Hashiba has been constantly demonstrating that they are doing the 'right' thing. And what is it they gain from that?"

"The legitimacy of their history recreation." Bernard answered immediately, but he did not stop there. "If they can demonstrate that they have been 'properly' fulfilling the history recreation..."

That would mean...

"Everything they are doing would be the proper course of action."

"Testament." The Roi-Soleil nodded and took a breath. "Bernard, you have lived far longer than me. Since you existed back when Hexagone Française was known as Gaul, you have lived longer than this very nation. I will show my respect on that front."

"What about the fact that I am a Celestial Dragon?"

"If you are a Celestial Dragon, then I am a god." The Roi-Soleil glanced back over his shoulder. "If you insist on using your status as a Celestial Dragon, I too will insist on using my status."

"I appreciate your thoughtfulness."

"And I am glad we have something in common. Besides, I am now a servant to love. That is something you can never understand, so I am thankful we can use our inherited names to speak together."

"I see," said Bernard, but then he restated it. "Testament. ...Does that work?"

"Testament, exactly right. ...Now, Bernard, that is enough of a preface. There is something I must tell you. You have lived a long life, but there is a lot about the present you still do not understand."

"How much has changed since Anne of Austria came to visit us?"

The Roi-Soleil nodded at his question.

"As Celestial Dragons, you must have noticed the Apocalypse's progress. ...The world's ley lines and ether are thinning and it will pass the critical point during October of this year. Given the close connection between Celestial Dragons and the ley lines, you must have noticed the reduction in the ether that forms you."

"...Indeed we have."

"Testament. I can sense it too. Lately, I have had a lot of split ends in my flares." The Roi-Soleil sounded calm. "At this rate, the Apocalypse will happen. It will not be a dramatic thing. The critical point will arrive and everything will simply fade away. And..."

And...

"We have heard two proposed methods of saving us from the Apocalypse. ...The first is the Far East's plan to have Musashi's princess gather all of the Logismoi Oplo and use them in some way. And the other..."

Bernard finished for the Roi-Soleil.

"I heard about that when I inherited this name. P.A. Oda's Genesis Project."

"Testament. ...Do you understand now?"

The Roi-Soleil pointed past Paris where construction continued through the night.

He pointed to the Azuchi far to the south.

"I think they follow the history recreation so closely to increase the legitimacy of their Genesis Project."

"Are you just guessing?"

"If I am wrong, feel free to laugh at me. My history recreation includes a love of theatre and I often get up on the stage myself."

"Yes, I suppose it's harder on the performer when people *don't* laugh."

And with that...

"————"

Bernard quietly laughed.

The laughter slightly lifted the corners of the Roi-Soleil's mouth as well.

"Bernard. ...I will make sure you are useful."

"Even with all this power as a nation and an army?"

"You refused Anne's invitation," said the Roi-Soleil. "You are not here now because of me, so I will show you I am an emperor who can conquer you. ...That is my tribute to Anne. To show her I can do this."

"Is that so? Is that so?" Bernard returned to a neutral expression and nodded. "Then what will the emperor show this mercenary captain?"

"What we have in common."

That being...

"The day after tomorrow, they will attack us as if we are Mouri no matter what it takes. So listen, Bernard, Protestant mercenary captain. I do not know your reasons, but we will crush Hashiba as a European force."

The Roi-Soleil created a flare in his raised palm and crushed it in his grip.

"I have no intention of granting legitimacy to P.A. Oda's Genesis Project. We must protect Europe as the rulers of Europe. That is what I mean."

"So what even is the Genesis Project?"

Naomasa spoke next to the weakened campfire.

It was past nine and the dampness of night dew was beginning to weigh down their yukatas and summer uniforms.

They all sat at the chairs near the fire or around the table.

Among them, Horizon responded to Naomasa's question.

"To be blunt, we don't even know how gathering my Logismo Oplo is supposed to save us from the Apocalypse."

"Judge. But we do have a hint for the Genesis Project."

While sitting in a log chair west of the campfire, Masazumi looked to the Reine des Garous.

She rested her elbows on her lap and leaned forward while the Reine des Garous crossed her legs and leaned back.

"Wasn't that 'to end the world but not to let it end'?" asked the woman.

"Yes. Those are the words Lord Matsunaga left us with."

"What a strange thing to say," said Gin who had removed her false arms and wore a track suit. She looked to Masazumi with Muneshige by her side. "I find it odd that he didn't just call it 'redoing the world'."

"That's true," said Narumi at the table by the fire. She rested her head in her hand and wore a large short-sleeved *kosode* to allow her false arms through. "Ending it but not letting it end. I don't really like that phrasing. It sounds like they aren't starting over again or resetting things."

"Then what...other way could you...say it?"

Hearing Suzu's question, Asama looked up and stopped working at managing the base camp's fire.

"The reverse would be 'to begin but not begin'."

"But which one is it?" Mary tilted her head while working with Tenzou to wrap the pots and plates in rush mats and tie them up with string. "Which one is more important?"

"What do you mean by 'which one'?"

"Judge." Mary nodded to Tenzou. "To end it and begin it again, or to not end it and not begin it. Which one are they putting more focus on?"

She sat up and lifted the wrapped plates a little.

She flattened her eyebrows as she confirmed the knotted strings could carry the weight of the plates.

"If they are focused on the former, they will work harder toward ending it. If they are focused on the latter, they will work harder to keep it going. Lord Matsunaga's statement did not indicate where the focus lies, so..."

Mary hesitated before continuing.

"Would the Genesis Project be to end it but allow it to continue?"

*That's right,* thought Asama concerning Mary's words.

It sounded like a play on words, but that description of the Genesis Project was contradictory.

"You can't simultaneously end something and not end it."

Asama spread her hands and then intertwined her two sets of fingers.

"So it must mean to do both in parallel."

"But is it possible to do that in parallel?"

Someone responded to Naruze's question: Neshinbara.

"There is a way."

Asama turned toward him and saw him staring into the campfire.

A closer look showed his right hand was held toward the fire.

**Asama:** "He's in his own little world, isn't he?"

**Mal-Ga:** "I was going to call him an idiot, but that's so cringeworthy I don't even feel like warning him..."

**Unturning:** "Urquiaga, does the Secretary's pose there mean anything?"

"Well," began Urquiaga before taking a breath.

**Uqui:** "It is the mood that matters. Narumi, don't you have someone back in Oushuu who runs almost entirely on the current mood? Well, don't you?"

"Okayyy! This is Katakura-kun, the annoying half of the Aoba Student Council President and Vice President duo! I know you're busy working through the night to repair the school building after Masamune-kun's Seiryu sliced right through it, but rejoice! For I am here to pay you a visit! Happy, aren't you? Ecstatic, aren't you? I mean, it's me visiting to harass you in the middle of the night! Now, with a name like Katakura-kun, it can be easy to mistake me for the Katagiri who's shown up in M.H.R.R. lately, can't it!? Eh? What is it, Yoshihime, Age 30? Theirs is really cute and I'm not? Now, now, Yoshihime, Age 30, how about you say what you really think!? Call me cute-noying! ...Who was it that just called me creep-noying!? Say it more!

"Anyway, they call him Kacky, so you all need to call me Kackoo! Got that!? Kackoo! Eh? What is it, Yoshihime, Age 30? You want me to jump around a bit? Sure thing! Listen, listen, do you hear all that money rattling around!? ...You want me to treat you to some food since I visited? What kind of tyranny is this!? Under no circumstances will I say no! I'll pay up! Dammit, I just have to hand over the money, right!? Are you really that cheap!? You'd better remember this! Cause I'm pretty forgetful myself!!"

Asama saw Narumi reach for the sake on the table without speaking a word.

*...Something must have come to mind.*

*Well, everyone's different.*

But that aside, Neshinbara's statement had her curious.

What had he meant?

Naito must have been wondering the same thing because she went ahead and asked him.

"Bara-yan? What was that you were saying about the Genesis Project?"

"I think we can take it at face value. Because..."

For no apparent reason, he grabbed a piece of firewood and held the fire in front of his face. When Suzu noticed...

"B-be careful..."

"Eh? ...Hot!!"

Neshinbara dropped the firewood back into the campfire.

"You idiot. The heat permeates the wood like a pipe," said Naomasa. "But I think I understand what you mean."

Are you listening?

"The idea of 'ending it while not letting it end' works if you do it in parallel just like Mary said."

"But 6th Special Duty Officer...how do you do that?"

"That's the question."

With that, Naomasa got up from her seat and stuck her false arm in the campfire.

She pulled out a large piece of firewood with a black carbonized surface.

"There. ...Oh, Suzu, this isn't too hot for me, so don't worry."

"R-right."

As Suzu nodded, Naomasa split the firewood down the middle.

...Ah.

Asama heard a dry sound followed by a fibrous tearing.

It was not fully burnt.

"Masa."

"Don't say it. Even I'm realizing this is kind of long-winded. But I might as well go through with it."

Naomasa reached into her skirt and pulled out a tool set that doubled as a carabiner.

With a light shake, a knife flipped out and she used that to flatten out the firewood's cross section.

After about 3 seconds of work, she blew on the firewood and held it up.

"How about that?"

On Naomasa's insistence, Asama viewed the firewood's cross section.

"The outside has been carbonized...but the middle is still living wood."

"It's pretty easy to tell here since this firewood hadn't fully dried out."

Asama understood what Naomasa was saying.

"Are you asking whether this wood is burned or not burned?"

"That's right. ...In fact, with the fire at this level, it would never be able to fully burn the inside. So you could say the fire has been set up perfectly to make sure it 'burns but does not burn'," explained Naomasa. "Also, this firewood can still be used as firewood, so we can say it hasn't 'ended'."

"Oh, I get it..."

That comment came from Toori. He and Horizon sat next to Mitotsudaira at the table.

"In other words," he said while crossing his arms and looking to Naomasa, "It's like someone who looks completely tanned but isn't tanned below their clothes."

"You didn't listen to a word of Masa's explanation, did you!? Did you!?" Asama was aware her shoulders had slumped. "But if we do assume the 'ending' and 'not ending' will happen in parallel, there is still one thing we don't know. ...Oh, and I'm not talking about the method used. This is a more fundamental issue."

"Heh heh heh. Asama, quit putting on airs and switch over to your ether exposition mode! Yes, I'm well aware you said 'one thing we don't know' as a way to obscure the issue! Now, were you obscuring it with steam or with a sunbeam!? If we have a choice, the steam is better because you can see through it by adjusting the brightness! If you ask me, we should add some steam to the Genesis Project! And you should ask me since it's the *Genesis* Project!"

Asama raised her right fist, so the idiot sister fled.

"Anyway." Asama took a breath. "The Apocalypse is a thinning of the ether flowing through the ley lines. That means it is happening in parallel across the entire world. So if it is happening to us and the air over there, it is also happening at the bottom of the ocean, deep underground, and in the farthest reaches of the heavens."

In that case...

"How is there a way to 'end' a portion of it but 'not end' another portion?"

Adele realized Asama was right.

But Adele had another thought as well.

*...Umm.*

She was not sure if she should say this. She looked around and found the others were also thinking about Asama's line.

They had their thoughts as well, so Adele chose to speak.

"Hey, Asama-san?"

"Yes, what is it, Adele?"

"You're our ether expert, so if you don't understand something, how are we supposed to?"

Everyone froze.

They silently stopped moving with their arms still crossed and hands still on their chins.

After a while, Horizon raised her right hand.

"I have a good idea."

"What is it, Vicereine Horizon?"

"Judge. ...In a way, Asama-sama has just dumped this problem on us."

"Uuh..." groaned Asama, making Adele feel apologetic, but the Vicereine...

"So, Adele-sama, how about you throw the question right back at Asama-sama by making it clear that the rest of us are no help whatsoever?"

"Wh-why do I have to do it!?" protested Adele.

She looked around for help, but everyone — Reine des Garous included — averted their gaze.

They apparently did not want to get dragged into this.

*...Suzu-san!?*

She looked back to find Naomasa holding Suzu's shoulders while they placed some potatoes in the campfire.

"Here, Suzu, this one is yours. You can look forward to eating it tomorrow morning."

"U-umm." Suzu glanced back toward Adele. "G-good luck."

*...How am I supposed to turn down that support!?*

She could not rely on Suzu now. In fact, she could not rely on anyone. She had to do this herself.

So she thought about what to say.

"U-uh, I just have to answer in some way that will convince her we're useless, right!?"

Horizon nodded with sweat on her brow.

"Judge. You must reveal to Asama-sama that we are hopeless excuses for human beings that she cannot even think about relying on! That is an important job."

*...Stop piling on the pressure!*

She could tell Suzu kept glancing her way, but she could not worry the girl. So Adele spoke to Asama.

"Basically, the overall density of ether is dropping, right? Then..."

Then...

"Can't we just constantly breathe in to gather it around us and increase the density? Surely you would undershtand that!"

Her tongue slipped.

**Unturning:** "What was that at the end? Going the extra mile to convince her?"

**Uqui:** "Narumi, even we know how to show restraint."

**Mal-Ga:** "Yeah, I wonder if the readers would get it if I used that for the ending of my next doujinshi."

**Flat Vassal:** "Why are you all focusing more on me misspeaking than on what I actually said!?"

**Me:** "That's right, everyone! Adele made a good attempt there! She was given a difficult task and she isn't even a professional, so that was an admirable attempt!"

Horizon threw a straight punch without even looking his way and the idiot made one full flip.

"Toori-sama, Adele-sama is feeling shamed, so why would you only continue to attack her? You need to be more undershtanding. ...Oh, my apologies."

"I-I see you're willing to take this pretty far, Vicereine Horizon!"

As the others tried to figure out what to do, Asama raised her right hand.

"Um, for now, let's just say I'm in charge of answering this but the rest of you should be seeing if you can come up with any ideas."

"Yes," agreed Masazumi. She looked around at the others. "And either way, I think P.A. Oda's Genesis Project will begin sometime soon."

"Why's that, Seijun? Have you awoken to prophetic powers?"

"You have, Crossdressing Honda-kun!?"

"Quiet, both of you. ...Listen. Nobunaga's assassination is the last time P.A. Oda remains a monolith. If they're planning some major event like the Genesis Project to save us from the Apocalypse, they can't wait until after the history recreation has split them apart, can they? That is why we need to search for a way to intervene in P.A. Oda's history recreation after the Houjou battle."

But Masazumi had more to say from there.

"And in addition to the Genesis Project, we are also pursuing the Princess. Asama is having trouble making sense of what the Genesis Project actually is, but the truth is we are missing a piece. We have yet to fully investigate the Princess who is said to be involved in the Genesis Project."

"You mean finding out what was originally in the center of the Age of Dawn relief we saw in that academy from the Age of Dawn?" asked Tenzou.

"Judge," replied someone other than Masazumi.

It was Mary. She wrapped her arms around his arm and leaned forward a bit as she opened her mouth.

She spoke directly with no hesitation in her voice.

"My father went missing 30 years ago along my mother and some others and then returned again, but so did the others who have fallen victim to the Princess Disappearances."

"We thought the ruins below Sanada were where they had gone," said Tenzou. "But the dates didn't quite match up."

"Judge."

Mary turned toward him.

She rotated her body around as if using his arm as a pivot point, so his arm ended up deep between her breasts and thighs.

As everyone held their breath and glared at him, Mary spoke with her eyebrows somewhat raised.

"The Genesis Project, the Princess Disappearances, the academy said to have

existed 30 years ago, and the Age of Dawn relief that was partially erased. We have been pursuing the three other than the Genesis Project, but has the time come for all of them to coincide?"

Tenzou sensed a threat to his life.

Mary holding onto his arm was not a problem. She had a habit of holding onto things without noticing and for someone as resilient as her...

*...It is such an adorable habit.*

Depending on her lifestyle or fate, she may have grown very attached to a stuffed animal or doll.

"—————"

He doubted she would ever live a life where she was attached to a character body pillow, but he was hoping he could give her a life that allowed this habit to continue.

But it was a danger at the moment.

She had done this before while wearing her uniform.

But now she was in her track suit.

This was the first time for that. The inner suit portion was the same as with her uniform, so there should not have been any real reason to grow flustered. And yet...

*...The top is different and the tights are different!*

He cursed his own love of overly-specific genres. He wished he could enter staring mode, but the way Asama and Mitotsudaira were fanning each other with their hands was too dangerous.

And just as he tried to figure out what to do...

"Master Tenzou?"

Mary's question brought him back to his senses. And...

"What is it, Mary-dono?"

"What do you think?"

*...Eh?*

He had not been listening.

No, he had been listening, but he could not remember if she had said anything since that.

*...Oh, no!*

Had she or had she not said something?

He was fairly certain there had been enough time for a "————". There definitely had been. Probably. But there was no guarantee Mary had said anything in that time.

*What should I do?* he wondered as he faced Mary's expectant gaze.

**Azuma:** "Tenzou-kun sure gives things a lot of thought."

**10ZO:** "I-I wasn't expecting anything from you!"

**Azuma:** "Well, it's just that Miriam makes up her mind immediately."

**Almost Everyone:** "Ho ho...?"

**Gold Mar:** "You were speaking with her via divine transmission before Asama-chi shut it down, weren't you?"

**Azuma:** "Yes. Miriam and that girl like hearing about things outside."

**Flat Vassal:** "You must be confident if you aren't denying it..."

Tenzou wished he could be that bold, but Azuma could be a bit clueless.

But even with something feeling off about this, Tenzou made up his mind.

*...I-I can just apologize if I get it wrong!*

At the very least, he could not ask his classmates. Well, he *could*, but his future was forfeit if he did.

So he made up his mind and replied to Mary.

"Mary-dono."

"Y-yes!?"

"Well...if you ask me..."

They had been discussing the Genesis Project and the Princess Disappearances. There was a lot to think about there, but...

*...If we can see the complete Age of Dawn relief in Houjou, we need to start with that.*

There were three other mysteries as well, but they could only guess about them at the moment. Since there was one they had an actual means of reaching, he felt like the shortest route would be to go see that one first.

But Tenzou remembered something.

In England, he had seen where Henry VIII, Mary's father, had been taken by the Princess Disappearances.

And below Novgorod, they had been present when Holland Chancellor William of Orange was taken by the Princess Disappearances and the emblem of the Princess Disappearances had appeared behind Mary's back as well.

For Mary, he doubted the Princess Disappearances that had taken her father was something she could simply view as a past incident.

So he gave an answer to what she had said before.

"Do not worry, Mary-dono. I will always be here to support you."

Tenzou saw Mary give a start in response to his words.

Her eyebrows were raised and her eyes somewhat widened as she directed those blue eyes straight toward him. But there was a red flush to her cheeks.

*...Huh?*

She continued looking him in the eye for the span of a breath.

Then Mary smiled and held his arm even tighter.

"Judge, thank you very much."

"Y-you're welcome."



His arm was entirely embedded between her breasts and his forearm was pressing against the line down from her navel.

*...I-I can't move...!*

**Asama:** “If she’s just touching you, it counts as an accident. Move, and it’s groping.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Tomo? Just out of curiosity, what’s the Shinto response to groping?”

**Asama:** “Well, first a loud groper alarm sounds along with some mood music, then the arm and hand that did the groping are twisted until they snap by the combat gods who couldn’t find a romantic partner, then the combat gods touch you all over where you tried to touch, three days later you get some nerve pain that feels like there’s an earthworm in your urethra, and also your hand is deflected from the person you tried to touch.”

**Tachibana Wife:** “Wouldn’t the first and last parts be enough?”

**Asama:** “It only ended up like that because each generation has had fun putting in their own additions. Oh, but Shinto is actually pretty strict on gropers. After all, the Shinto gods often say things like ‘Eh, an animal’s fine too’ or ‘I was actually an inanimate object all along!’, but as long as they establish a connection, they’ll get married and take responsibility. So in Shinto, you can take responsibility with animals and inanimate objects, but gropers who don’t take responsibility are harshly punished.”

*...So this nonsense is a legitimate part of Shinto!?*

Tenzou shuddered, but then Asama smiled in his direction.

“Isn’t that great, Tenzou-kun?”

“...Huh!?”

His confused exclamation received a response from Naruze who was inking a sketch without looking his way. She made it sound completely obvious.

“Mary said, ‘Master Tenzou, is it a nuisance having to support me with your arm all the time?’ ...Note: pay attention to the different expressions Mary makes when she’s talking about something serious and when she’s noticed a

gap in how they rely on each other.”

“What are you jotting down in your notes?”

But that solved the mystery.

There had been a misunderstanding and he had jumped the gun, but his statement about supporting Mary had not been wrong. Also...

**Silver Wolf:** “Anyway, since this has Mary’s approval, wouldn’t it not be groping even if the 1st Special Duty Officer did move?”

**Gold Mar:** “That’s a lot of responsibility.”

**Scarred:** “...Responsibility?”

**Asama:** “Th-the responsibility to support you, Mary! And you holding onto his arm is the proof that he’s doing that, so keep doing it a whole bunch, okay?”

*I’m not sure if Asama-dono is being a nuisance or gift-giver this time. But...*

*...Even if I can move, I still can’t bring myself to do it!*

At least he would no longer be harshly punished for any accidental movement. However...

“The more our people discuss things outside of Musashi, the more mysteries we find about the Genesis Project,” said Masazumi with a sigh.

Then Muneshige smiled from his seat at the table.

“That just means you have some excellent people who can notice the things you have overlooked.”

**Mal-Ga:** “Excellent people? Who? Other than Margot, I mean.”

**Worshiper:** “Whew... I thought I was only popular with the little girls, but now I’m being praised by Muneshige-kun who isn’t just outside of my interests but in another category altogether? It must be the youthful life force radiating from me.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Honestly, that kind of depresses me since I haven’t been able to say much tonight.”

**Me:** “C’mon, Nate, you’ve been keeping a close eye on our surroundings this whole time. To protect us, I guess. Wouldn’t that be why you haven’t been saying much?”

**Silver Wolf:** “Eh!? Y-yes, I’ve been keeping an eye on, um, not one of us, but certainly something in the area. Because I need to be ready no matter what might happen.”

**Vice President:** “That’s more or less it. And if we discussed this any further, we would only be making speculations on top of earlier speculation. Everyone, can I have your attention for a moment?”

The Reine des Garous saw everyone’s eyes shift from their sign frames to their Vice President.

*...Oh, my.*

They were quite disciplined.

It had looked like they were having some kind of silly conversation a moment before, but they had all shifted their attention at a word from their leader. They did seem to have some large openings, but being able to switch that on and off meant a lot.

*...I suppose that would be the Far Eastern and Musashi way of doing it.*

The Far East was under provisional rule, so they had no second chances as a nation.

They were standing on the precipice, but there was no point in lamenting that fact.

They had no second chances and they had to keep their focus on reality.

But they could not remain that serious at all times. That was as true for adults as it was for children and the elderly.

The Reine des Garous herself knew quite well that it was impossible for anyone to constantly brood over something.

Even if they knew they had no second chances and that they were under a lot

of pressure, they would end up moving in a more cheerful direction. Because as long as they abandoned the pride that insisted they be serious at all times, they knew they would be able to keep this up for longer if they remained cheerful.

She had learned that when she met her husband.

“———”

The Reine des Garous knew that her daughter had to understand that as well.

No, all of the boys and girls here did. As did their king.

Since they had no second chances, they would enjoy themselves in the moment.

Things could get dangerous when they continued carrying on during battles, but...

*...With the life I live, I can't exactly tell them to take things more seriously.*

That was a job for their teachers, their Vice President and other officers, and their leaders.

As a parent, she was curious how her daughter and her friends would enjoy the present. Wanting to know that her daughter was living a fun and happy life may have been a bit self-indulgent for a parent who had chosen to live away from that daughter, but she was still curious.

However, she did not intrude on their sign frame conversation.

Musashi and Hexagone Française were on friendly terms, so they did exchange information. That allowed her to view and intrude on their conversations and she had done so before, but the situation was different here.

She was to be their enemy and she was within the barrier set up by the Asama Shrine Representative.

Inside that barrier, their Vice President spoke.

“We have exchanged some information. And I believe we have shown you what we plan for the future. Tomorrow, we will head to Houjou during our travel day and the day after that we will fight the Tensho Jingo Conflict and the Siege of Odawara. There, we will check the Age of Dawn relief in Houjou and

after that...we will find a reason and means with which to intervene in P.A. Oda's actions. A lot of you will have work to do tomorrow, but tomorrow will generally be a rest day to continue the study camp. Got that?"

She received several overlapping responses of "judge" and "yes". And...

"Does anyone else have something to say here?"

"Judge."

The Reine des Garous heard a voice from one of the seats around the fire.

It came from a boy.

That squinty-eyed boy had been tying up the firewood and taking apart the stones for the cooking stove they no longer needed. He raised his hand before making his statement.

"Give me two days...no, a day and a half of time. ...There is somewhere I want to visit on my own."

# **Chapter 8: Sky Viewer on the Ground**

## 第八章

### 『地上の空見人』



外に出る理由は  
いつも誰かに会いに行くこと  
配点 (計画性)

*The reason someone leaves*

*Is to go and meet someone*

### **Point Allocation (Planned)**

Naito looked up when she heard what Noriki said.

He had said he was going somewhere for a day and a half, but...

*...So it's somewhere he can go in a day and a half, is it?*

"Where will you be going? I'm assuming it isn't anywhere on the Musashi. Right, Nori-rin?"

"Nori-rin..."

He glared at her, but she had always called him that. And he had always glared at her in response, so nothing had changed.

Next to her, Naruze also turned toward Noriki.

"A day and a half or two days? It must be somewhere pretty far away. Couldn't you get there quicker if we gave you a ride on the back of our Schwarz Fräulein or Weiss Fräulein?"

"No, it's pretty close to here. But there's something I have to do there."

Someone responded to Noriki's statement: Asama. She opened a sign frame by her hands.

"It's Suwa, isn't it?"

"Judge." Noriki nodded. "Suwa's main shrine in Shinshu. From this part of Sanada, it should only take half a day on foot."

*...Suwa, huh?*

Naito quickly opened a Magie Figur and called up a map of the Far East.

Asama would normally perform the check of such a wide area, but she could not act here.

*...It's on the Shinto network, but this is a shrine from a different affiliation group.*

Asama was a shrine maiden of the Asama Shrine that worshiped Sakuya and the Asama Shrine was Musashi's main shrine.

Meanwhile, Noriki belonged to Suwa which had its main shrine on the surface and managed his old home, making it his birthplace shrine.

Since Suwa belonged to a different affiliation group, the Asama Shrine had to act as an intermediary for him to access it on the Musashi.

The Asama Shrine handled the formal processing of his contract and spells, but when politics were involved, it was dangerous to get too involved in issues related to another affiliation group's god. If anything happened, they would have to repay the other shrine in some way.

So...

"It would also be a pain to have Seijun check over this, so I'll handle the map of the area," said Naito. "Since Ga-chan and I do delivery work, we have the map that's been built up since Musashi's construction."

Naito had already displayed the map in her hand. She first had it show Sanada land and the area around Ueda.

The map primarily showed the provisional borders and cities.

The details were centered on those areas and things grew more abstract farther away from them. Some parts were in color, but that was mixed with areas in black and white or drawn in pen.

It was a patchwork collection of small maps drawn from what was visible on or near the Musashi.

The map had been passed down by the delivery business, but not even delivery workers could leave the Musashi. However, they had spent decades photographing a wide area using telescope spells while the Musashi was in flight.

*...And this is the result of cutting and pasting them all together.*

The images Naruze had taken near Mito would have already been added in.

Naito wanted to check on that, but now was not the time.

She found the area she wanted and zoomed in. Then she held it overhead.

"Does this work?"

She pointed at one point in the Koshinetsu region from behind the Far East map.

"This here is where we are now. It's near the border between northwest Koshinetsu and south Sviet Rus."

And...

"Nori-rin wants to go to Suwa, Shinshu, in western Koshinetsu. That means he needs to travel more than 20km southwest."

But...

"Nori-rin, won't that be pretty tough?"

"What will?"

"The Yatsugatake Mountains that extend down from the southern Alps are located between Ueda and Suwa, so you'll probably be crossing a mountain. Since you're used to life on the Musashi, won't you have a hard time traveling on the surface?"

"That's right," said Naomasa. "You stayed back and looked after the tents today because you wanted to preserve your strength, didn't you? ...That would explain Neshinbara too."

"How could I say no to such a cool request?"

"Don't be dumb," continued Naomasa. "Crossing a mountain will be too much. Especially since that area is pretty dangerous with the Altai Mountains of the continent's central area appearing as a Harmonic Territory. ...If you're going to do this, you need to take a detour either north or south and use a transport ship. That would be safer. Besides, you'll have to go all the way to Houjou on your way back. The battle will be over by the time you arrive on foot."

**Asama:** "I didn't know Masa could be so considerate..."

**Smoking Girl:** "I've always kept an eye on the continent's routes and terrain. I

was curious about the land that gave the Suzaku its name, so I did a lot of research into Qing-Takeda which also takes names from there. I've memorized most everything from Mikawa to the Tianshan Corridor."

**Mal-Ga:** "Judge. ...I understand completely. I can use that for my doujinshi."

**Smoking Girl:** "How does that make any sense!?"

**Gold Mar:** "Who said anything about needing to make sense?"

**Asama:** "That's right! You're senseless! You people are completely senseless!"

**Silver Wolf:** "If Naomasa joins the lineup too, will it distribute the damage away from me?"

*Ohh, Mito-tsan is taking a positive view,* thought Naito as she heard Noriki sigh.

But his sigh seemed to sap the strength from his body.

"Nori-rin. ...As you can see, you should really give this some more thought."

"Judge. But..."

She knew why he trailed off.

"You're not a Special Duty Officer or anything else, so there's no real reason to send out a transport ship for you, is there?"

"Then can't Masazumi-sama use her authority as Vice President to make Noriki-sama someone's aide?"

"No, she can't do that, Horizon."

Toori waved his hand in front of Horizon's face. He then moved in front of her and began grinding his hips side to side.

"Y'see, Horizon..."

Without speaking a word, Horizon threw a low punch into the idiot's crotch.

The dull and somewhat muffled sound caused everyone to stop moving.

"\_\_\_\_"

Three seconds later, the clothed idiot fell to his knees with this long black wig fluttering behind him.

Horizon spoke to the idiot who hung his head and stopped moving.

"Toori-sama. You should not move around so carelessly. What if someone hit you with a surprise attack?"

"W-wait, Horizon. L-listen. Just give me, um, hm...th-thirty seconds before we try to talk any more."

"Why do you sound like a girl?" asked Tenzou.

But the idiot sat with his knees apart, tried to keep his hips as high as he could, and slapped his lower belly.

"O-okay! I can do this! I can do this! Y'see, Horizon..."

"Noriki-sama has the necessary combat skill, but he also has his family to look after. So if he became a Special Duty Officer's aide, his work-home balance would fall apart."

"Judge. Sorry about bringing my private life into this, but that's why."

"H-hey! Noriki! She stole my line, so couldn't you have passed that one off to me a little better?"

"No."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

It was incredible how readily the idiot accepted that.

**Mal-Ga:** "This is why he's so hard to put in my doujinshi..."

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. Are you praising my foolish brother?"

**Mal-Ga:** "You're even harder...!"

*Ga-chan, no need to get so worked up.*

But then someone else spoke to Noriki.

It was Narumi. She was seated at the table and sipping on some sake.

"Why are you thinking so much of your family here?"

"My family used to be Houjou retainers."

"Judge." Narumi nodded. "That makes sense."

*So that's it, thought Narumi.*

*...Do I pick up on political issues so quickly thanks to our Secretary?*

As she came to that internal understanding, she sensed someone's gaze on her.

It was the vassal. Also the bangs girl and Musashi's princess.

The three of them were giving her a "What does that mean?" look.

*...It doesn't really matter if you understand this or not.*

But she understood the desire to understand if it did not matter one way or another.

So Narumi looked to the girls who were tilting their heads.

"Listen. Someone from a family that used to be a Houjou retainer will now be fighting against Houjou. Do you know what would happen if he gave no thought to his family in that situation?"

"Judge. In that case, they would have a hard time gaining the trust of Houjou as their *former master* after we win the Houjou battle."

Gin answered and Narumi nodded.

*...I suppose she would have an understanding of how clans work.*

This had to do with political negotiations. Since people like her were often influenced by political factors, it made sense they would understand this.

And that seemed to be why their Secretary pushed up his glasses and looked around at them all.

"Listen, everyone. The Siege of Odawara will actually strengthen the Matsudaira forces in the end. ...While trapped in Kantou, Matsudaira absorbed the remnants of the fallen Takeda clan and then takes in the remnants of Houjou here. That allows us to act as a powerful force in the east that rivals Hashiba in the center."

So...

"Because Matsudaira takes Houjou in as their own force, we need to take good care of them. Noriki-kun's presence will provide a foundation and example for them here."

"Sorry about all this."

Hearing that, their Chancellor waved his hand back and forth.

"No, no. It's more than enough that you can make an appearance on the front line. ...But how do you plan to get to Suwa and back again in time?"

"Well..." The laborer of a former Houjou family brought a hand to his chin. "If I do make a detour via transport ship, which way would be shorter?"

The Schwarz Hexen had an immediate answer to that.

"North."

Naito showed Noriki the map on her Magie Figur.

She moved the speedometer-shaped scale bar to zoom it out a bit.

It displayed the mountain range crossing north to south between Ueda on the east and Suwa on the west.

Naito began by placing her finger on Ueda and drawing a red line south.

*...Um, is it here? Midway between Yatsugatake and Yokoo.*

She placed a mark at a gap in the mountains leading south.

"You have to go pretty far south before you reach a route connecting east to west. The south leads to the southern Alps, so you'd have to cross that boundary and pass through at high altitude, which would take some time."

"Then I should go north?" asked Noriki.

Naito nodded.

"It looks like the longer way around, but it should cut down the travel time a lot."

But just as she said that...

"Wait."

Someone stopped her.

It was Masazumi.

She viewed the raised Magie Figur with her arms crossed.

"The northern route would be dangerous."

"Why?"

"Shibata's forces remain in southern Sviet Rus."

*...Oh, she's right about that.*

That reminded Naito that the Siege of Uozu Castle they held at Novgorod had ended Shibata's invasion of Sviet Rus.

She and Naruze had been on the front line then and had kept Shibata's fleet in check.

Shibata's forces had been forced to retreat from Sviet Rus during that battle. But...

"Even the Testament says Shibata's group continued fighting against Sviet Rus. They continued to defend against attacks from Sviet Rus and showed signs of trying to invade. ...That makes Shibata's forces the northern defenders for Oda."

"But that invasion and defense delayed their arrival during the assassination of Nobunaga." Neshinbara opened his own sign frame and crossed his arms in a solemn fashion. "But these Shibata forces seem to be a little different."

"How so, Bara-yan?"

"Judge. Their battle formation has been moving eastward. The Testament descriptions have them more toward western Sviet Rus, but they have moved to the east instead."

With a comment of "listen", Neshinbara expanded the sign frame.

It displayed a map of the Far East from Kantou to near Kinki.

This one was of Neshinbara's own making, so it was nothing compared to the one Naito had.

But he placed some colors on the map.

An area was colored red from Tokai to Kinki.

"This is P.A. Oda's main force. Nobunaga's troops. And to the east..."

A small area was colored in green.

"This is Sanada. And between Sanada and Nobunaga's main force...we have this yellow. These are the areas ruled by Oda's people such as Mori Nagayoshi or Takigawa. They *were* here until the other day. Do you know what that means?"

"Judge." Mitotsudaira nodded as she grabbed some cooked chicken from her table seat. She placed the chicken on a container of heated rocks to reheat it. "Takigawa lost her territory during the Battle of Kanagawa. ...She has of course joined with Houjou to recreate a portion of Komaki Nagakute, but that is a different matter."

"Yes. Also, that means Takigawa's territory at the southern end of the Oda-controlled territory is now unclaimed. And Matsudaira will receive that land through the Tensho Jingo Conflict against Houjou."

Neshinbara filled Takigawa's land in with blue.

And that meant...

"Once we complete the Houjou battle, we will border Oda's main forces."

*That would explain it,* thought Naito.

"Seijun, that's why you want to intervene in Nobunaga's assassination after the Houjou battle, isn't it?"

"Judge. You know what I'm saying now?"

"Yes," said Naruze from next to Naito. "I do. If we border them, we can find some excuse to start a big war with Oda's main forces. The biggest war imaginable will begin, which will turn Masazumi on so much she'll wait for nightfall and...oh, I know what the doujinshi after next will be."

"Wait! You're veering off topic!"

Naito and everyone else ignored her.

And Neshinbara made another change to his map.

"Specifically, this is what will happen to Matsudaira territory after the Houjou battle."

He added blue to the entirety of south Kantou, where Houjou was.

"After the Siege of Odawara, Matsudaira will gain all the land and troops from east and south Kantou. That is what will be happening in the world next. So Shibata's unit is placing their battle formation to the north as a deterrent."

Noriki spoke up as if in response to that.

"So if I go to the north, Shibata's forces or the main Oda forces will interfere?"

"Correct," said Neshinbara.

Adele raised her hand at that while looking back and forth between Naito's map and Neshinbara's map.

"But Suwa is in P.A. Oda land, isn't it? They helped Takeda prepare for their destruction as part of the history recreation and they gained the right to protect Qing in exchange, but if Suwa was taken into P.A. Oda, isn't it the same whether he goes north or south?"

"Going north gives them an excuse to interfere," answered Narumi. She used a chicken skewer to point at Neshinbara's map and she spoke plainly. "We originally came to Sanada for a study camp and we drove Takigawa out of the land south of Sanada. So traveling to Suwa from the south means visiting from our provisionally-held territory. And Musashi would send out the transport ship while heading south to Houjou, but that means it happens while the threat of Musashi leaves to the south."

"That's right. ...If he chooses the north route, Musashi will be sending a transport ship north before moving south, so it could look like a provocation of the Shibata forces."

"So south then," said Noriki.

Naito nodded and used her finger to draw a red line circling around to the south on her map.

"That would be a total of about 120km. By my estimate, that would take about 6 hours at full speed on a transport ship."

"That was my estimate as well."

Since Naomasa concurred, it was likely accurate.

"That just leaves the ship..."

But just as Naito said that...

"Um, everyone? One thing." The Reine des Garous raised her right hand. "About that former Houjou boy. ...While you haven't mentioned what he will be doing in Suwa, should you really be discussing all this in front of me?"

"Um, mother?"

Mitotsudaira turned toward her mother.

The woman tilted her head as if to say "Yes?", but she was across the campfire from them. She could leap to any part of this clearing in a blink of an eye if need be, but that cushion of distance was still appreciated.

Mitotsudaira spoke while focusing on her role as a knight.

"Mother, you will be our enemy two days from now. So we aren't about to mention here just what tricks we have up our sleeve."

"Oh? Nate?"

Her mother narrowed her eyes.

*...Eh?*

That teeth-baring smile was a dangerous sign, so Mitotsudaira mentally prepared herself for whatever might come.

"Tricks up your sleeve? ...Are you saying he will be participating in the battle the day after tomorrow and he is going to Suwa in order to learn a spell for that battle?"

*...Oh, no!!*

That was a leading question, or a leading response, or something.

She felt like her entire body had gone pale. However...

"But, Nate, your king said earlier that it's more than enough that he can make an appearance on the front line. ...Heh heh. So the answer to my question was plainly obvious to begin with. Right, Nate?"

"Kh...!"

Her mother was teasing her. She felt completely set up.

But in that case...

"Masazumi, how much information were you planning to reveal to my mother?"

"That would be up to Noriki...or I guess Neshinbara since he set this up," said Masazumi with a slight lowering of her shoulders.

Neshinbara chose to respond to that.

"Reine des Garous."

"Heh heh. What is it?"

"Please give me your autograph. Oh, and I mean for both Turenne and Masuda Motonaga. And two autographs for each."

"My, my." Mitotsudaira's mother only smiled more. "Is the second one for your girlfriend in England?"

**Mal-Ga:** "See? She's your girlfriend."

**Gold Mar:** "If you don't agree, you won't get those autographs."

**Hori-ko:** "Now, Neshinbara-sama, how will you respond to this challenging dilemma?"

**Asama:** "Um, we're inside a barrier right now, so should I open a special connection to England for just Shakespeare-san?"

**Novice:** "Why are you all so unified on this one!?"

"I only need autographs for myself. But please give me an extra of each as a

spare."

Mitotsudaira saw her mother laugh at Neshinbara's request.

**Smoking Girl:** "He really doesn't know when to give up, does he?"

**Flat Vassal:** "Why are boys so stubborn about the weirdest things?"

**Gold Mar:** "Reminds me of Asama-chi."

**Asama:** "What does this have to do with me!?"

*Sounds accurate to me,* thought Mitotsudaira as her mother accepted the autograph papers.

Then her mother pulled some lipstick from her cleavage.

"W-wait, mother! Why are you carrying that around with you!?"

"Heh heh heh. Don't be silly, Mitotsudaira!" said Kimi. "All women need to be ready to pretty themselves up at a moment's notice! Look, I'm carrying a microphone there! Oh, but I guess that wouldn't be possible for you... I know! I can teach you how to carry things between your butt cheeks! Won't that be great!?"

*That crazy person needs to shut up.*

At any rate, her mother smeared some lipstick on her finger, wrote out her signature with it, and passed the signatures back to Neshinbara.

"Okay. The simplest explanation is that Noriki-kun is going to Suwa in order to alter March. That way he can set the version."

"I can register an original spell at Musashi's Suwa, but when I also want to include a change to the settings, I can't provide very detailed instructions. I need to do that at Suwa's main shrine."

Noriki then looked to Mitotsudaira's mother.

"And it's not about you."

Her mother looked calmly back at Noriki.

And Noriki suddenly scratched his head, presumably because of what he had said.

"No, that's a bad way of putting it. ...This isn't about something to use against you."

"Hee hee. So I've been rejected?"

"I will fight you if need be," stated Noriki. And he continued from there: "But this settings change I'll be doing at Suwa...is for use against Ujinao."

"My." Mitotsudaira's mother placed a hand on her cheek. "You're a lot more passionate than you look."

"If you understand, there's no need to say it."

Noriki then added a "but" while turning to face everyone from his chair. He placed his hands on his spread lap and lowered his head.

"I will be leaving for a bit. Please give me this time."

"Wait." It was Futayo that spoke out. "Noriki-dono, what if the battle ends before you arrive?"

"That's fine. This is my personal issue."

"And you are fine with that too, glasses boy?"

"Glasses boy..." everyone muttered before Neshinbara nodded.

"From a tactical standpoint, Noriki-kun's March is a balance breaker that can destroy barriers, defensive or otherwise. He played an important role during the Novgorod battle for that reason. But..."

But...

"If he can gain a spell for use against Houjou's Chancellor, that should lead us to even greater results than March has had before. If we can set things up to conclude with a duel between Noriki-kun and Houjou Ujinao, then our victory is guaranteed."

"Judge. ...Then as Vice Chancellor, I grant authorization for a portion of our fighting force to leave."

"Okay." Masazumi clapped her hands. "Does anyone else have something to say?"

Mitotsudaira just about shook her head, but...

*...At this rate, we'll be headed back to the base camp!*

Her mother would finally discover the tent arrangements.

Mitotsudaira frantically turned toward her mother.

"Mother! ...You have to go join Houjou now, don't you!?"

"Oh? What are you talking about? I'm spending the night here tonight."

*...Why does she sound so unsuspecting!?*

But this was dangerous.

"Um, we don't have a tent ready for you."

"Well, then I can just stay in your tent, can't I?"

"...Eh?"

*Oh, no.*

Once she thought about it, that was the natural solution.

No matter how much she thought about it, she could not come up with a good reason to send that bombshell of a mother to another tent.

**Silver Wolf:** "Adele? Would you believe me if I told you sleeping next to my mother made your boobs grow?"

**Flat Vassal:** "5th Special Duty Officer, you're living proof that isn't true."

**Silver Wolf:** "Th-then what about Futayo's tent?"

**Tonbokiri:** "I toss and turn *a lot* in my sleep, but if that is fine with her..."

*Why does that tent sound so dangerous?*

And Gin was sharing a tent with Muneshige.

"U-um, mother? ...There isn't much room in my tent!"

"Oh, my. Who all is in there with you?"

*...Why did I bring it up!?*

Mitotsudaira thought long and hard. She felt like she was desperately pulling

in a rope.

At the table, Horizon spread her arms and measured the width of her own head.

"So each side has one, two... I believe we could fit one more."

"That's gotta be bad for your circulation..."

"Oh? Foolish brother, then should I sleep on top of you?"

"K-Kimi, how do you always think outside the box like that!?"

The others were joining the discussion, which only increased the danger.

Mitotsudaira quickly faced and spoke to her mother.

"I-it's just that, um, my hair takes up a lot of space."

"Can't you let it rest on top of you? Loup-garous are perfectly capable of sleeping on our stomach."

She knew that. And she realized it had been silly to think her mother would not know that.

And her mother bent her eyes in a smile.

"Nate? ...You're hiding something, aren't you?"

"I-I would never! What would I ever hide from you, mother!?"

"So you'll tell me the truth?"

**Gold Mar:** "Ture-yan sure is good at this."

**Mal-Ga:** "Yes. I knew Mitotsudaira was bad at arguments, but I didn't realize it was possible to be *this* much better than her."

**Silver Wolf:** "Stop acting like you're not a part of this!"

But her mother's smile had not budged.

This was bad.

She considered running away and spending the night elsewhere, but her mother would probably hunt her down in the mountains. Plus, she still remembered her mother saving her long ago when she got lost in the forest

and fell asleep.

*...Wh-what am I supposed to do!?*

And just as Mitotsudaira gasped, an unexpected voice reached them from outside.

"Okay, everyone. Is your meeting about over? We have to head out early tomorrow, so get to sleep."

It was Oriotorai.

*...I'm saved!*

Mitotsudaira used a burst of acceleration to turn toward their teacher.

"Sensei! Do we have a tent for my mother to use?"

"She won't be sleeping in a tent, Mitotsudaira. She's your mother."

*A den then?* she thought, but she did not want to waste this opportunity. So she worked to form a smile and remain calm as she spoke.

"Judge. Then, Sensei, do we have a bed for my mother to use?"

"Yes, how about..."

Oriotorai pointed back toward the faculty bungalows lined up on an elevated area bordering the clearing.

"...she joins us in there?"

"My, what a lovely place."

*Hallelujah!*, thought Mitotsudaira.

Her mother had been distracted. *Thank you, sensei.*

*...I'll give you a year's supply of Mito natto as thanks!*

But then Oriotorai put her hands on her hips and smiled a little.

"It's a bit cluttered with sake bottles, though. Still, it's roomier than the kids' tents."

"Oh? Nate mentioned that too. Are the tents really that cramped?"

"Mitotsudaira's is, what with Toori, Horizon, Kimi, and Asama in there with

her."

Silence fell.

After a while, Naruze sighed.

**Mal-Ga:** "How long should I wait to peek inside if I want a good illustration?"

**Scarred:** "Hee hee. All of them sleeping together would make for such a nice picture."

**Gold Mar:** "Oh, it would. It definitely would."

**Silver Wolf:** "This is no laughing matter!"

But her mother turned her way with a smile.

"Sensei? On second thought, I think I'll be staying in my daughter's tent tonight."

"U-um...mother?"

"Yes, Nate?" asked her smiling mother. "You said you wouldn't hide anything from me, didn't you?"

"Why are we holding a festival at night without bothering to hide anything? This has gotten completely out of hand."

There was noise.

A gold winged figure listened to that noise by the water's edge which was as bright as day even though it was night.

That figure was Katou Yoshiaki.

She was in the open-air pool built atop the bridge of a transport ship. She was listening to two things along with Wakisaka Angie who was sitting on the poolside and operating a Magie Figur.

One was the noise from the festival being held on the ship.

*...They're even livelier than during the day.*

The festival was an advance recreation of a portion of the Siege of Odawara.

According to the Testament, Hashiba showed off how confident they were by holding a multi-day festival while flooding Houjou's Odawara Castle. But this was dangerous if they tried to hurry through the Siege of Odawara. As a delaying tactic, Houjou could claim they had to do the festival before the battle.

That was why they were holding the festival in advance, but...

"Since the two of us will be heading out for the Siege of Odawara soon, we have to actually take this seriously."

"That's right, Angie. ...But I'm disappointed in the night pool. It's way too bright."

However, the sounds of the festival were lively.

There were flutes and drums, but the Far Eastern sounds were joined by M.H.R.R. ones as well.

And beyond those sounds, a second set of noise arrived from the north.

"That would be the noise of the construction in Paris."

# Chapter 9: Technohexen Below the Lamps

# 第九章

## 『提灯下の魔女達』



水位の上昇が  
急激に生じるなら  
何もかもは沈まず  
何れも流されうに  
配点 (えろ)

*If the water level*

*Rapidly rises*

*Everything will be swept away*

*Instead of sinking*

### **Point Allocation (Ero)**

Yoshiaki viewed Paris in the distance.

With Angie by her side, she heard the sounds of festivities and of construction, which sounded like distant thunder. She listened to them both together and spoke.

"I never knew it made so much noise when dragons dug into the dirt."

"It sounds more like they're smashing up the dirt than digging into it."

Angie showed her a Magie Figur.

It displayed a silhouette image with Paris's nightscape in the background. The giant dragon silhouettes were moving and digging around the city while decorated by the wooden jib cranes on the city walls.

*...With just the silhouettes, it looks like the city of Mephisto.*

From the city's perspective, they had to look like a partying ghost ship floating in the night.

*So we're both the same on that front,* thought Yoshiaki as she approached the poolside.

"The edge is a bit torn up here. Is that due to the god of war shell grazing it yesterday?"

"I'm amazed Kacky wasn't hit."

"It couldn't reach someone as short as him when he was treading water. But the impact would have knocked him down to the bottom, so it's lucky he didn't drown."

During that battle, Fukushima and Kiyomasa had done serious damage to a

god of war each. But they had been stopped by an old man. And Kiyomasa had been injured in a way that could have been fatal.

...*That was...*

"Katou Danzou. To think he's here too."

There were a few different ninja said to have been the strongest of the Warring States period.

Katou Danzou was one of those and he was an illusion user. He had preferred illusion techniques to martial arts or ninja techniques, but his *illusions* had seemed real and concrete and he had even manipulated the very clan he served.

Of all the ninja said to be the strongest, his actions ranked at the very top.

And they had confirmed that this was really him.

They had sent an inquiry to Shibata's group currently deployed to Sviet Rus.

According to that, the old man had served as Novgorod Mayoress Marfa's butler under the name of Toby.

That was of course a fake name. Katou Danzou had originally served the Uesugi clan, which fit with him being at Novgorod.

He was said to have ultimately ended up at Sanada, but...

"I never imagined he would be the teacher of the Sanada Ten Braves."

"He was probably just their lead teacher. They apparently referred to him as their 'great teacher'."

"Then were the other Celestial and Terrestrial Dragons just 'teachers'?" Yoshiaki rested her head in her hand on the poolside. "I wonder what our teacher is doing."

"Which one?"

"The current capricious one." Yoshiaki sighed. "She's supposed to be a teacher, but she's only ever thinking about her grudge. She generally just leaves us alone, but I'm glad we weren't caught up in that. ...Because we have our own task to do."

They heard a loud and solid sound from the north.

"Sounds like they split some kind of rock. Dragons sure are powerful."

"That's not going to be fun for our group. I mean, look."

Angie placed an image over the Magie Figur displaying Paris.

It was a moonlit silhouette.

"This is the large dragon that attacked the transport ships before. It was photographed while it fell, but it's different from the 6 dragons around Paris now."

"A dragon mercenary captain. Hexagone Française really aren't holding back, are they?" said Yoshiaki. "But I get why they're so motivated here. If they survive this, then Hexagone Française only has a future of victory remaining."

"It's the same for us, isn't it?"

Hearing that, Yoshiaki thought, *That's true, isn't it?*

*...I can't believe it.*

"My bad, Angie. I'm just in a negative mood right now. ...Starting with this time period, Hashiba is almost undefeated in its Testament descriptions, isn't it? Is Komaki Nagakute the only real exception?"

"There's also the retreat from the Keichou Campaign. Still, I understand why you're feeling so negative. Because it's the stake that sticks up that gets pounded. Oh, and that's not a euphemism."

Yoshiaki could tell Angie was being considerate and that made her feel both apologetic and thankful.

It improved her mood a bit. It felt like she was opening her heart as well as her mouth.

"Even if we have constant victories to look forward to, the possibility of interpretations means we can also face real hostility. As long as we're up on the stage, we will have to face people like that. Since we're working for a conqueror like Hashiba, we have a lot of battles and duels we have to fight."

"Yeah... If only we could just take it easy."

*Agreed*, thought Yoshiaki, but this was their destiny.

"And after we chose Katou Yoshiaki and Wakisaka Yasuharu as the easier Ten Spears names to inherit."

"Angie's just so cute, I couldn't imagine being anyone else."

She had to be referring to her name. Surely she wasn't referring to herself in the third person.

Then they heard another loud sound from the north.

"They sure are noisy."

"They're probably making the moat even deeper than planned. They must be thinking about what comes after the battle."

"What's that?"

"You know." Yoshiaki pointed at Angie's image of Paris. "The Seine runs east to west through the center of Paris. That means it isn't built up on elevated land. It's just built on a normal plain. That's what makes it so susceptible to flooding."

"I've been wondering. Is there any point in them digging a moat?"

Angie had a good point.

A moat would only provide a temporary buffer. Especially for a city on a plain.

But there was a point to it.

"It simply makes it harder for ground forces to enter the city. And we can't bring a whole bunch of ships onto land either. That's why the attacker will generally only surround the city after flooding it. This means they want that situation. And if they have another reason..."

It would be...

"So they can divert a branch of the Seine around Paris's perimeter after the battle. And that will have two different effects."

"Agricultural development?"

"A city of Paris's size will already have fully developed farmland around it."

"Then," said Angie as she looked up into the sky. She viewed the lamp spell lights hanging down overhead. "For defense on the European battlefield?"

"Yes, that would be one effect. After all, Hexagone Française will continue waging war with other nations after the Thirty Years' War. They also have advance notice of a civil war. So it would be a good idea for Paris to fortify itself for the future. But in addition to that..."

Just as Yoshiaki said that, a voice reached them from the stairs leading up to the bridge-top pool.

"In addition to that, it provides urban development."

It was Takenaka.

Angie had some issues with Takeko but also quite liked her.

Her issues were with Takeko's instructions. She was always asking for ridiculous things and Angie would honestly have no idea what those instructions meant half the time, so she would need Yoshiaki to explain.

*...I want to believe that doesn't mean I'm dumb...*

She figured she was fine as long as she was still worried about it. And if she was not fine, she had already decided she would blame it on fighting too many battles and call herself a victim of the current age.

But what she liked about Takeko outweighed those issues. After all...

"Takeko. Have you got the battle all figured out?"

"Yes, yes. Mostly anyway."

She was carefree.

Takeko would make ridiculous requests, but she would readily accept ridiculous responses. That came from her focus on their mission and objectives above all else, which Angie quite liked. She did not hide anything when they had the same objectives and she did not act like a strict commander. On top of that...

"Do you want a treat?"

"I do, I do."

Takeko held up a tray holding plates of eclairs.

She was apparently saying to come and get it. When her partner raised her wings in preparation to get up on the poolside, Angie held out a hand to stop her and then stood up.

"Come to think of it, that's an enemy treat, isn't it?"

Angie and Takeko had similar tastes in treats and they tended to get along in conversation as well. Takeko was the type to nod in agreement and then pinpoint target exactly what Angie did not know when she asked questions. It was easy to tell she was smart.

Ten steps away, Takeko set the tray and her shoulder-carried bag down on the poolside. Angie approached.

"So how are things?"

"Right, right," said Takeko while laying a long towel at her feet and removing her coat.

She wore a two-piece swimsuit below.

*...She has a surprisingly large chest.*

She had been worried about her belly during the physical examination, so this may have been similar.

But Takeko pulled a late-night snack and some nausea medicine from her bag.

"Well, to put it simply, Hexagone Française has done a lot to prepare for the flooding and they're thinking about what comes after that as well."

"You mean the urban development you mentioned?"

Angie arrived, gave a wave of thanks, and took two plates from the tray.

"So what is Hexagone Française doing while they fight?"

"Testament. ...Waterways can be used to wash away sewage in this age. If they can surround Paris with a branch of the Seine, they can then expand the city outside that waterway."

She opened a *lernen figur* and drew the circle of Paris with the Seine running through the center from left to right. And...

"It kind of looks like the Double Border Crest..."

"Angie."

Angie smiled bitterly at the voice reaching her from behind.

"Yes, yes. I won't say anything."

"Ha ha." Takeko laughed bitterly. "You have a lot to worry about, don't you? ...Anyway, it would look like this." She drew a waterway around Paris's perimeter as well. "If they expand outside the waterway with the same ratio as on the inside, they will double the city's area. Paris is already one of the world's largest cities in this age and this would mean gaining that much space all over again."

"Only a large nation could pull that off. Anyway, Takenaka, how is the battle looking?"

"It really is going to come down to the flooding."

"Will you be able to settle things quickly?"

"It's a method of defense, but there is a way."

Angie frowned at what Takeko said.

"Defense?"

They were supposed to be going on the attack with a flooding.

They would build levees to hold in the water, cause the Seine to overflow its banks, and flood Paris.

That was how it was supposed to work, but...

"Why would we be using a defensive method? Aren't they fortifying Paris so they don't have to come out? And even if they do come out, it'll only be a surprise attack using that Bernard's mercenary dragons, right?"

"No, no. They'll have their full forces work hard and come out to fight."

As usual, Angie had no idea what Takeko meant.

*...I really have issues with this.*

But she heard a voice from behind her.

"Angie, stop eating and bring me mine."

"Oh, sorry."

She had started eating hers without thinking.

They had to get going early the following morning. And they would have to be on their best behavior if they were carrying Kani to Houjou. It was not that she would have nothing to eat tomorrow, but she wanted to feel like she had "filled up" in advance. So...

"Here, here. ...Thanks, Takeko."

"Want to hear about our tactics?"

"We're not actually going to be here."

"That's right," said Yoshiaki as she climbed up onto the poolside.

*...Ohh. Your boobs are so big, Kime-chan.*

Her wings forced her to climb up with her chest hanging down, which accentuated its size.

"The air on the ship is adjusted, but Hexagone Française is pretty humid this time of year, thanks to the Far Eastern climate. ...Hey, Angie? What are you looking at?"

"Where that éclair will end up."

With that, Angie arrived at her partner. She looked back to see Takeko splashing herself with the pool water and uttering an "ahyah!"

"Takeko. The water is heated, so you don't have to be so nervous. And you're still wearing your glasses."

"Don't worry. They're waterproof."

*Does that actually mean anything?* she wondered, but she had something else to say.

"If you throw up in there, they'll probably get mad at you."

"I'll be fine. I just ate an easy-to-digest Far Eastern pizza."

"Oh, yeah. The Testament Union gets after us if we call it an okonomiyaki, don't they?"

"When I was mixing it in the bowl, I thought it looked a bit like vomit and nearly threw up right then."

"You're doing it to yourself now?"

"I didn't actually."

Finished splashing water on herself, Takeko swung down her hand to get the water off.

*...Is there any reason for that when she's about to get in the water?*

This was another side of Takeko she liked. Even after knowing her for years, the girl still seemed so bizarre. But there was something she had to ask her at the moment.

"Can we win?"

"That's the plan."

"How much damage will we take?"

"Well," said Takeko as she got in the water. "Oh, it is warm! This isn't bad at all."

*She's trying to avoid answering me,* thought Angie as Yoshiaki spoke to her from the side.

"I hope she has the same opinion the day after tomorrow."

She was glaring and she spun around on the poolside. She turned to face the water.

But she did not let her wings move. She simply faced the water which did not reflect the night sky due to the bright lamps. Then she sat on the poolside and looked up into the night sky with her feet soaking in the water.

Angie looked up too.

There were two moons there. Angie silently held out the eclair and Yoshiaki

took it, so she was not completely self-focused. That was why Angie spoke to her while viewing the moons.

"I wonder if we'll be able to see this tomorrow morning."

"Good question." Yoshiaki looked up at the same moons. "It's such a nice night with no real pressure." She took a breath. "Our battle with Musashi begins the day after tomorrow, but the sky is such a beautiful bluish-black."

Below the night sky, a waterfall roared and a river flowed.

Like the bottom of a canyon, the river banks had cliffs rising up on either side.

The pebbly river banks had a few tents with lights on inside and a giant bamboo launcher towered from the ground near the center.

The emblem of Musashi Ariadust Academy was painted on the outside of the tents.

Someone was wandering restlessly between the tents.

It was Mitotsudaira.

She was slowly walking between each tent and looking around.

...Umm...

She had been with her mother, her king, and the others as they entered the tent, but she had concluded that tent would be like hell on earth for her and she had left on the pretext of "standing guard outside". However...

"Uuh..."

She was sleepy.

She had fought hard that afternoon and then she had eaten dinner, taken a bath, and eaten even more just now. Of course she was feeling sleepy. Her king and Horizon had already gotten some sleep, but Tomo and Kimi would...*No, Kimi is probably fine.*

Whatever the case, she felt like whoever went to sleep first would lose.

So she needed to keep moving as much as possible. She patrolled between

the tents, sat down on a large rock on the river bank and sighed. Then she looked around and viewed the tent's light from outside.

*...It would be so much easier if my mother would just go to sleep...*

The problem was her mother's seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy. She seemed similar to Kimi in that regard, so it was game over if those two joined forces.

"Honestly..."

*What am I supposed to do about this?* she wondered, but then...

"5th Special Duty Officer?"

"Eh?"

She looked over to find Adele next to her. And Adele said...

"You fell asleep."

"Huh?"

Mitotsudaira quickly sat up straight. However...

*...Oh?*

When had she started resting her head in her hand? The last thing she remembered, she had been viewing the light of the tent.

She realized she had bent forward and that her hair was quite heavy.

Adele gave her a bitter smile.

"Want me to take over for you?"

"N-no, I..."

"But you have family visiting."

"Yes, but that's the whole-..."

Mitotsudaira looked to Adele and trailed off before saying "problem".

Adele no longer had her parents.

But Mitotsudaira also noticed that Adele carried her vassal spear over her

shoulder. So...

"Is my shift over?"

"Yes, they're only 2 hour shifts. We weren't too strict about it last night, but there's a lot going on in Houjou tonight."

That meant they did not have to show any extra consideration for each other's situations. They could focus entirely on their duty.

*...So it's already midnight.*

"Who has the shift after yours?"

"Judge. The 1st Special Duty Officer said he'll do it. And it's apparently Persona-kun-san after that."

Adele spread her mouth horizontally in a smile.

Then she raised a hand next to her mouth.

"I'm thinking of sending Mary-san out of our tent during the 1st Special Duty Officer's shift."

"That's a great idea...!"

No matter what might happen to Mitotsudaira, it was guaranteed to be overwritten by another topic in two hours' time.

"Well done, Adele!"

"No, no. I still have a lot to learn."

Mitotsudaira was not quite sure what that meant, but now her safety was guaranteed.

*...I guess I'll have to return to our tent now.*

She overheard some voices from the boys' tent on the way.

"Hey! Someone play a 7 already! I'm about to lose here! And after I made sure to use this deck of cards with an 'Elder Sisters of the World' theme for good luck!"

"Then you hurry up and play the 12 of hearts based on Mary-dono! Then lose and hand over that Weird Juice that came as a bonus with My Elder Sister is a

Popular Gaul: Norman Conquest Edition!"

"Did they just try to cram in everything they could there? Besides, what idiot is holding onto a 6? This Husband Otto III that I won isn't going anywhere otherwise."

It was an ugly argument, but if the 1st Special Duty Officer was that fired up, he would be fine standing guard for a shift.

At any rate, her king's tent came into view.

Standing in front of it, the light within showed her the actions inside via silhouette.

The silhouette that looked like a large pyramid was likely her mother.

She was still awake. And she was saying something.

"Yes, Nate can be so silly. When she first swam in our spring, she was afraid of the water and couldn't point her belly down. I had no choice but to help her, but she insisted she didn't need any help. I wasn't sure what to do then. And then she must have let her belly get too cold because she p-..."

"Motherrrrr!!!!"

Mitotsudaira threw open the tent's entrance, but Asama had apparently been leaning against it because she fell back.

...Eh?

Mitotsudaira had two reasons for her confusion. The first was Asama's unexpected presence, but the second was...

...*My king is sitting directly across from her.*

Asama was the type to not wear anything below her yukata.

After losing her balance and falling back toward Mitotsudaira, Asama frantically held her hands between her thighs.

"Kyaaaaah!"

"That got exciting in a hurry," said Naruze while poking her head out from

their tent's entrance.

Adele stood by the entrance.

"Yes, they do make things exciting..."

"That they do. But Adele." Margot poked her head out above Naruze's and smiled at Adele. "That was a good job. Set up Tenzou and Ma-yan next."

"Eh? ...Oh, judge! I can manage that, yes."

Adele smiled a little and raised her right thumb.

She then sighed and looked across the group of lit tents.

Her gaze stopped on the one from which they could hear Mitotsudaira and the others' voices.

"Things have gotten even more exciting since Vicereine Horizon arrived. Also..."

Also...

"Lately, I think Vicereine Horizon has started becoming a driving force. For all of us, and for the people around her and the Chancellor in particular."

Adele held some words inside herself.

She chose to not say the line she had been about to say:

*...Vicereine Horizon is a lot like the Chancellor, isn't she?*

At some point, an individual desire to avoid feeling sorrow had grown into an attempt to create happiness over a wider range that still included herself. But...

*...She isn't seeking the greatest happiness for each person individually...*

For example, there was everyone in that tent. The Reine des Garous was different, but Asama, the 5th Special Duty Officer, and Kimi were included in a single "relationship" for which she sought the greatest happiness.

That was likely her hope that everyone could be happy. And it had to be...

"A borderline?"

It was wrong to think that one person's happiness meant the loss of someone else's happiness.

It was not two parallel lines of happiness and unhappiness. It was a borderline where they could all gather together in happiness.

That seemed to be what those two were searching for.

*...If so...*

Would that happy borderline reach the group in that tent and the others surrounding the tent before it reached anyone else?

"What is it, Adele?"

"Oh, um, a study camp really makes you think about a lot, doesn't it?"

"It really does..." Naruze rested her head in her hand and stared off toward the chirping of summer insects. "I've gotten some incredible material here."

"I knew you were going to take this in that direction! I just knew it!"

She was the same as ever. But then the Schwarz Hexen raised her pen.

"I'll list up all the material born from the idiots' tent later. ...But how is your tent?"

"Oh, we swapped some people around, so now it's Suzu-san, the Vice Chancellor, and the Vice President's tent."

Adele then recalled the state of things in her tent. They had laid out their blankets and the Vice Chancellor had immediately fallen asleep, but...

"She tosses and turns as badly as I saw back in England, so Suzu-san and the Vice President have stacked up their things to protect themselves. Also..."

"In a way, Masa-yan and Narumin's tent must be the tent from hell."

"Yeah, the Treasurer's Aide was supposed to be in there, but she's on the Musashi..."

Adele looked over to that tent with a tone of resignation in her voice.

The silhouettes were moving and Naito commented on the shapes and movements.

“Are they swinging something big around in there?”

“Judge. They’re apparently getting drunk while discussing prosthetic arms. They have that in common, so earlier they were drinking like crazy and chatting away about joint structures or something.”

“Yeah, there really aren’t many other people around to discuss that with...”

They could hear some voices from that tent.

“Huh? That would improve efficiency, but it’d kill the precision. And you call yourself an engineer?”

“Something solid is good, but the engine division needs ease of maintenance too. ...That should be obvious!”

And so on like that.

“It sounds to me like they’re arguing...”

“But they’re actually hitting it off really well. Once they get back to the Musashi, I bet you they’ll go out shopping for tools together. I guarantee it.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. But unlike with Uqui, I bet Narumin won’t speak all that much while out with Masa-yan. I guarantee it.”

*...How can you guarantee that?*

The scary part was that Adele kind of felt like Naito was right.

At any rate, there was one more tent of interest.

“Noriki-san’s tent?”

That was the only tent with its light out, but there was a small light source inside.

“Persona-kun-san and Ohiroshiki-san are playing a fighting game against each other on their sign frames, aren’t they?”

“Why would you play a game after coming all the way to Sanada?” asked Naruze.

*But drawing up doujinshi storyboards is fine?*

*But, thought Adele. Everyone has started to move.*

As she had thought before, the Vicereine's arrival had set a lot of things in motion: the things that had come to a stop or the things people had settled for.

*...Including Asama-san and the 5th Special Duty Officer.*

Back in spring, no one would have thought those two would be sharing a tent with the Chancellor and Vicereine on their study camp.

*...And including me too.*

"What is it, Adele?"

That was the same question as before, but she had a different answer now.

"Well, I was just thinking we've come a long way and done a lot since Mikawa."

"Yes, you're right about that. Back when we were losing to Sensei at Mikawa, we never would have dreamed that you would be doing anything as extreme as having a chain slam you and your mobile shell into a dragon."

"D-did you have to zoom in on something I'd prefer to forget!?"

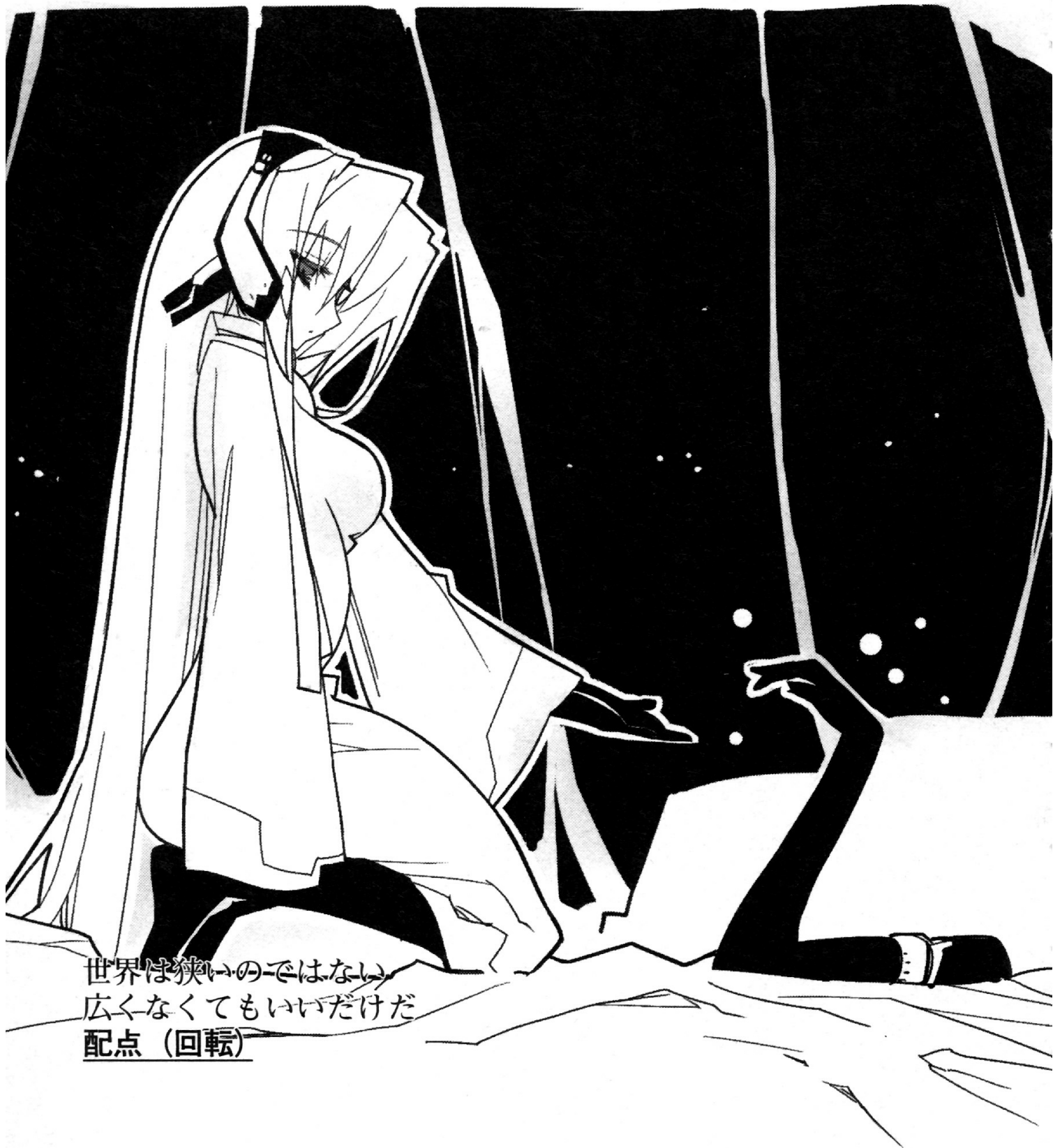
That made Adele realize something: They had done a lot and come a long way, but...

*...Our actions and reactions haven't changed at all...*

# **Chapter 10: Battle Formation at a Mini Meeting**

## 第十章

### 『小会議場の布陣』



世界は狭いのではない  
広くなくてもいいだけだ  
配点（回転）

*It is not that the world is small*

*It simply does not need to be large*

### **Point Allocation (Revolving)**

"Since we have a parent with us now, it is time to decide anew where we will sleep."

Horizon sat near the center and spread her blanket out.

Based on that, Asama thought about where she would sleep.

*...Kimi will probably lie across the entrance while the rest of us line up perpendicular to that.*

"Umm, I guess it would be Mito's mom, Mito, Toori-kun, Horizon, and then me."

Since they were the leaders of the room, Asama made sure Horizon and Toori nodded.

*...Other than Mito's mom being here, it's the same as yesterday.*

Just as she thought that, Kimi touched her butt while lying down.

When Asama gave her a scolding look, Kimi pressed her face against her waist.

"Heh heh. Relieved that you have the same position as yesterday? Or disappointed?"

"No, not really."

She decided to answer, but she could not help but wonder which of the questions she was responding to. However...

"Want to trade spots?"

"Eh?"

In Kimi's spot, she would no longer be able to use his arm as a pillow, but she would be able to view his face.

*...W-wait just a second here.*

She started thinking about which spot would be better, but there was a slight problem.

Her definition of "better" needed to take everyone in the tent into account, not just herself.

Looking at it that way, Kimi's spot was closer to the center than her original one and it let her view all of them once, which meant she could see his face while he-

*...No, that's not the point!*

Just as Asama quickly erased those thoughts, Kimi rubbed her cheek against her waist and spoke in a quiet, rolling voice.

"If I had your spot, I wonder if Horizon would trade spots with me."

"You can't do that." Asama immediately answered with a glare. "Our current spots are just fine. Yes."

"Oh, dear. You really can't negotiate when it comes to my foolish brother, can you?"

It irritated Asama how Kimi's shoulders shook with laughter. The dancer's head was in the perfect position, so Asama grabbed and twisted her ear.

"Ahn. A-Asama, no, you can't just grab my sensitive flesh like that. Before moving onto my foolish brother, have you chosen me as your first target to ra...ra..."

"Ravish?"

"...Good enough!"

*Good enough for what?*

But when Asama looked over, she saw Horizon nodding their way while sipping a cup of tea she had pulled from somewhere and he clearly wanted to join in his sister's gag as a black-haired crossdresser.

It was the usual way of things.

Mito was glaring at Kimi and her mom was the only one seeing all this for the first time.

...Eh?

Asama realized Mito's mom was responding to the idiot sister's antics differently than expected. Asama had expected an "oh, dear" or "my, my" of exasperation or surprise and maybe a bitter smile, but...

"———"

Why was she narrowing her eyes like this was a familiar sight?

It made no sense to wonder if she had seen this before.

Kimi and Mito's mom should never have met before.

Of course, it made sense that she knew him. If what they had said was to be believed, after he was abducted in IZUMO, he was bound with a chain and collar and fed some food while naked, he bled during the night while naked, and he had slept in the same bed as her.

*...I-I have no idea how much of that is true, though!*

It was all so hard to understand that Asama had once tried drawing up a picture, but the result had been too powerful. She felt the biggest problem was having him be on all fours since this was Mito's family. She had burned the picture for purification purposes, but she had made sure to take a picture just in case. Long story short, she had one more thing she could not afford to have anyone else find out about.

At any rate, they had an early morning tomorrow.

"C'mon, let's get to sleep so we're ready for tomorrow."

"Oh? Can't we talk a while longer?"

Mito's mother sounded disappointed.

Asama sensed no falsehood in her tone.

*...Yes, I suppose she hasn't spent time with her daughter in a long while...*

They had briefly worked together in Hexagone Française, but they had still been enemies. That was true here as well, but there would be little clear hostility between them until the meeting with Mouri tomorrow.

It was possible they would never have a chance like this again.

"..."

Asama mentally scratched her head.

She recalled the past.

*...I lost my mother...*

The problem was that she did not understand what it was like to be a mother.

Her mother had treated her quite well and she still sometimes felt something like her mother's presence around the shrine. Was that like an ancestral spirit? She wanted to think her mother was watching over her.

*...Huh? Come to think of it, would our ancestral spirits be okay with the situation here?*

"Uuh..."

She had expected her thoughts of the past to make her sad, but that did not happen.

She was far too accustomed to the way things happened around here.

But there was a specific reason she did not feel sad.

Before her mother had died, there had been a period of time when she had spent a lot of time together with her mother.

During that time, her mother had taught her so much about cooking, general life skills, and Shinto.

They had laughed together while she asked all about how her parents met and about her mother's past.

Thinking back, that was one way of "inheriting" things.

So when her mother had died, she had been sad, but the feeling of having left anything undone in their relationship had been much weaker than it otherwise would have been.

She had lost her mother, but she could act in her mother's place.

She had been taught everything she needed to do that.

What made it even more incredible was how her mother had not skimmed on

the foundational knowledge.

For cooking, she had taught Asama the purposes of different broths and cooking methods instead of just how to make a few specific dishes.

For Shinto, she had taught Asama the purposes of different spell and contract types instead of just how to use some spells.

That allowed Asama to use her mother's techniques to create her own techniques. That meant she could also adopt spells that were suited to the current age.

*...I'm not even on the same level as her...*

She had plenty of her own spells, but she was not sure she could teach someone else to make things like that.

Her mother had her beat.

Of course, Mitotsudaira and this sleepover with her mother was not that sort of thing.

But while "inheritance" could happen all at once like with Asama, it could also happen slowly over many years without either party noticing.

But what would happen if they did not have that?

They would temporarily become like he had. So...

"Ah."

At some point, Asama had become completely lost in thought.

Kimi was peering up at her past her breasts.

"Have you made up your mind? Are we going to talk or not?"

"Y-yes, let's talk. ...But why is it my decision to make?"

Horizon raised her hand in response.

"In emergencies and when we need a decision with real finality to it, I can take over, but I believe decisions about human relationships and everyday things are best left with you."

"Really?"

"Judge." Horizon nodded. "For example, that is why I had you heal my wounds today."

Asama listened to Horizon's decision.

"As an automaton, I could always just replace my parts. I sometimes choose to do that in order to lessen the overall burden. But personally..."

She showed off the healing charm attached to her arm.

"This is definitely better for me as an individual. And the boy next to me tends to live from moment to moment, so he needs someone to lecture him," explained Horizon. "Also, Asama-sama, while you generally claim you do not want to go along with Toori-sama, myself, Kimi-sama, or Mitotsudaira-sama, you always ultimately give in."

"I-is that how you see me!?"

"No," he said. "If you say 'let's do this', then we'll definitely do it."

That left her speechless and he raised his right arm.

He too had a charm there.

"I've always had you heal me when I'm hurt, but even if I said it wasn't necessary, I know you'd never take no for an answer. ...But of course you won't. You can't just ignore someone who's hurt. If someone acts all tough and says they don't need help, it isn't gonna make the injury heal any faster."

She found herself agreeing with him, but did that mean he already had her in checkmate?

But there was something she wanted to ask.

No, there were a lot of things she needed to ask. But if she had to choose just one...

*...What does Toori-kun think of me?*

She then added another thought.

*...Choosing that one is useless if I don't actually ask it!*

She had done it again.

She had closed the lid and covered up her heart.

But if he could make that decision, then he had the right idea of her. She trusted him that much. So if she did ask her question, it could not be done to doubt him.

It had to be a confirmation of their trust for each other.

*...Oh, that's a good excuse.*

She may have been closing yet another lid, but that was probably what was causing her so much internal turmoil.

She definitely trusted him.

She understood what Horizon was saying and that automaton was not the type to lie.

But this was sudden and she was not sure if she could trust in herself and her trust of him.

This could mean a lifelong commitment, so of course she was giving it careful thought.

And more importantly, she found herself unable to imagine what would become of her relationship with him and the others.

But was her mood really what determined whether this mindset was cowardly or prudent?

There was one thing she could say, though.

*...I don't dislike the idea.*

Kimi would pounce if she said that, so she held her tongue.

Simply being here may have qualified as self-destructing, but she wanted to hold onto some pride for the moment. That might be cheating, but it might be the last time she could ever cheat like this.

So she spoke.

"Do you need me with you?"

That question contained a strong sense of "good grief".

She felt the comfort of knowing she would receive an affirmative response and she was all too aware of how unfair a question it was. Even though she was always putting on acts like this.

He then lowered his head a bit.

His response was coming.

That was to be expected, but she still tensed and straightened up.

"Uh...Asama?"

"Y-yes?"

He replied while scratching his head and looking extremely troubled.

"You just asked if I need you with me, did you not?"

"Why so formal?"

"Don't worry about it," he said while miming setting aside some luggage.

And he still looked troubled when he continued.

"The thing is..."

"Yes?"

He said it.

"Do you really think I could get by without you? Because I really don't think I could."

Mitotsudaira saw Asama's head briefly slump down.

*...Oh, that did a lot of damage.*

Translated into words, her reaction was "He's right...!"

After all, they had a spell contract that could kill him as well as the standard Shinto divine protection management and other everyday things.

"Tomo, you do a lot of my king and Kimi's laundry, don't you?"

"...Well, yes, it does end up that way. Since they change in my room and

stuff..."

"Also, you go through the process to get my king released when the guards arrest him."

"...Yes, the guards just seem to contact our shrine when that happens..."

"And you make lunch bentos for my king and Kimi..."

Once Mitotsudaira said that, Asama looked up with her eyebrows raised in a smile.

She looked incredibly tired or desperate.

And she spoke to Mitotsudaira with that smile.

"But, Mito, you sometimes make lunch for Toori-kun too!"

*...That's true...*

Her king could cook, but he tended to neglect himself. Since Asama did not prepare a lunch for him every single day, she would sometimes arrange for something instead. However...

"What-..."

Just as she was about to ask what Asama's point was, she felt a hand on her left shoulder. Then she heard a voice.

"Nate? I'd like to hear more about this."

It was her mother.

**Silver Wolf:** "Tomooo!!"

**Asama:** "Eh? What's wrong? It's the truth, isn't it!? Isn't it!?"

**Hori-ko:** "Now, Mitotsudaira-sama, can you survive this?"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. This is so entertaining! I'm glad I'm his sister!"

**Silver Wolf:** "Th-this is no laughing matter!"

Mitotsudaira heard her mother take a breath behind her on the left.

She could not afford to turn around.

If she did, she would definitely be at her mother's mercy.

If possible, she wanted to slowly move forward and out of her mother's attack range. But...

"Hey, my daughter's king? How often does *that* happen?"

Her king looked to the princess and his sister to confirm.

"About once for every three times Asama does it?"

"...Nate!"

*Time to run*, thought Mitotsudaira. *My life will be so much more peaceful if I just run and run and meet back up with them at Houjou. Yes, and my king is sure to forgive me if I make it in time for the battle.*

*Oh? But how is she still holding onto my left shoulder after I scooted forward?*

"Mitotsudaira-sama, you should do something about that strange smile and return to reality."

"You're not going to let me run away, are you!?"

"Calm down," said her king before turning to her mother behind her. "Nate makes sure I eat right, so it's not a problem."

"Judge. That is correct, Mitotsudaira-sama's mother. Her lunch event only triggers when Toori-sama has forgotten a lunch and Asama-sama did not prepare one, but it is always a proper lunch, so I will eat it with him."

"Really? What does she make you?"

Horizon answered without a moment's delay.

"Yakiniku."

"My! In the classroom!?"

"Judge. She uses an incendiary spell with the metal grill she stores in a locker. As long as she puts in an order with the vendor by the start of third period, she can prepare it in time."

Mitotsudaira had a realization as she listened to Horizon's explanation.

*...My unrestrained lifestyle is finally catching up with me...*

She loved yakiniku. Her king also loved yakiniku. Everyone had to love it.

She had started it as something of a joke, but it was well received and it had since become something of a rare skill of hers. However...

*...The second in line to rule the Far East and a Rank 1 Knight really shouldn't be cooking yakiniku in the classroom...*

What was her mother going to say? It was all true, so there was nothing she could say if her mother laughed.

And then she heard her mother's voice.

"Way to go, Nate!"

"...Huh?"

Her mother grabbed her by the hips and instantly spun her around so she faced backwards.

Her mother was there. And the woman placed her hands on her shoulders with a serious look on her face.

"A man and a woman eating yakiniku together is a way of saying you want to have a different sort of meat festival that night, isn't it!?"

She was spun back around.

*...Ehh?*

She saw her king, Horizon, Kimi, and Asama there.

Kimi sighed with her arms still around Asama's waist.

"Oh, Mitotsudaira. So that's what you meant when you tried to get up on my foolish brother's lap from below the table and barked with joy when he gave you meat with his chopsticks."

"Nate...you went that far...?"

"I did not! I really didn't!"

"But you did eat it from my chopsticks," said Horizon.

She was spun around again and had hands placed on her shoulders again.

"Nate! You were trying to win over the princess before moving onto the king, weren't you!?"

She was spun back around and saw Horizon nod.

"Exactly the way I want it."

"What!? What does that mean!?"

But her king tilted his head.

"Hmm?" He crossed his arms. "Nate?"

"Yes?"

"When I stayed at your Maman's place, she served me a ton of meat dishes. Is this what that was about?"

She spun herself around.

"Motherrrr!"

"Oh, I definitely meant it that way."

Horizon suddenly hit the king.

Without leaving his seated pose, he spun around twice and the back of his head slammed into the floor. Horizon grabbed his collar with her right hand and lifted him up, but her arm popped off and his head slammed into the floor again. The arm frantically crawled over to hide behind their luggage where it poked up above and turned back and forth like a periscope.

"This boy really needs to stop nearly getting himself preyed on thanks to his inherent heroine nature."

"H-hey, are you just going to ignore what happened there!?"

"That is a different issue."

"Yes, but that's not the point!"

Meanwhile, the right arm returned. It crawled cautiously toward its owner a few times and then leaped to the side. Horizon glared at it and then held out her left hand.

"Come on over. There's nothing scary here."

"Yes, there is!!"

The right arm seemed to give up and stopped moving, so Horizon grabbed it and reattached it. Then she spoke to the king.

"See? Now I forgot what I was about to say."

"A-and that's my fault!? That's what you're saying, isn't it!? Okay, fine. Give me your worst!!"

He pointed his butt toward Horizon and lay down on his side.

"Okay! Bring it oooon!!"

Horizon gently stuck Lype Katathlipse's blade between his butt cheeks.

"Ah, wait, watch out! You're really gonna make that crack deeper!"

"I wonder what would happen if I used the overdrive cutting that I rarely ever get a chance to use."

Mitotsudaira could only watch.

It seemed even her mother could not intervene. And since Horizon seemed to have such an advantage over her mother...

*...That's my king for you...*

"Mito! Mito! Why do you look so impressed!?"

"Anyway," said Horizon. "Toori-sama, I am not sure how many people you could support beyond Asama-sama and Mitotsudaira-sama, but do not forget that I am at the top and Asama-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama, and Kimi-sama are also here."

Meaning...

"If you try to expand this battle formation just for fun, then I will stop you."

Asama felt her heart race when she heard Horizon's words.

*...Don't expand this battle formation just for fun?*

Did that mean Asama and Mitotsudaira were not just for fun?

...Wow...

Heat filled her face and lowering her head was the most she could do.

The idiot sister clinging to her waist rubbed her cheek against Asama as if to say "me too, me too", but Asama restrained her with a Shinto iron claw.

And he spoke to Horizon.

"Um, Horizon-san?"

"Oh? Acting humble, are we?"

"Judge. ...You see, we first introduced this whole battle formation idea before the study camp, right? Well, Nate Maman was before even that, so it doesn't count! Isn't that how it works?"

Asama watched Horizon's reaction.

"———"

Horizon looked up at the pyramid of fabric that was the tent's ceiling.

A lamp spell charm hung down from a string.

Horizon stared intently at that charm as it swayed in the tent's slight air current.

This lasted a few seconds.

As everyone tensed, sweated, and wondered if this would turn out okay, Horizon lowered her gaze.

She turned toward him and nodded.

"You and your cowardly excuses."

"You spent all that time trying to find an excuse to attack me instead of apologizing, didn't you!?"

"Ho ho? So after trying to act all responsible, you're going to say what you did in the past doesn't count?"

"H-Horizon?" said Mitotsudaira. "You can be stubborn if you want, but before you were saying it wasn't right to accept my mother into the formation and now you're nearly asking him why he won't accept her in."

"You need to face reality, Mitotsudaira-sama. This is reality."

"Well, yes! Of course it is!"

*I'm glad I'm not on that side,* wholeheartedly thought Asama.

Even in such a small tent, your position could lead to further damage depending on your proximity to certain others.

But then he waved his hand forward and back.

"Hey, it's not like we can accept Maman anyway."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because you've got a husband. And he's crazy reliable."

"My," said the Reine des Garous with a blush. That smile made Asama realize something.

*...Not only did he compliment her husband, but he implied Mito's mom is an incredible woman who needs someone really reliable to be on her level.*

He probably only meant it as a statement of fact, but...

"Heh heh. What has you so upset?" asked Kimi.

"I am not upset," replied Asama.

"Oh, dear. You could stand to learn a lesson from Horizon."

She looked over to see Horizon had changed her pose. She was forming a square frame with her index fingers and thumbs and getting low angle shots and bust close ups of Mitotsudaira's mother.

"You have a point..." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "Heh. You wouldn't stand a chance."

"D-did you just laugh at me!?"

"Calm down," she said.

A question occurred to Asama as she looked to Horizon, him, Mitotsudaira, and Mitotsudaira's mom. It concerned the idea of being "reliable" that they had mentioned.

*...What if that happened?*

Could she just ask?

She was hesitant.

And there was a simple reason for that hesitation: his presence.

Could she ask this in front of him? She considered the question for a while.

*...Umm.*

But she sensed the answer would be of use to her, so she opened her mouth.

"Um, Mito's mom?"

She addressed the woman to end her hesitation.

And she asked.

"What if-..."

But just then, a voice called in from outside.

"Chancellor! The 1st Special Duty Officer and the others are saying it's time to head into the forest for a bit!"

It was Adele.

Adele regretted volunteering for a guard shift.

After all, she could see everyone leaving their various tents.

*...Well, it's not absolutely everyone.*

"Are you heading out to catch bugs and view the stars!? You all sure are tough!"

"No, no." The 1st Special Duty Officer carried a telescope in a leather bag. "Since it's the last night, I thought it would be nice to have some more childlike fun. Plus, I've been resting using Mary-dono's spells since we got back from the ruins."

"Hee hee. Master Tenzou, thank you for entertaining my selfishness."

"Selfishness?"

"Judge." Mary smiled bitterly in her track suit. "You suggested this after I said

I wanted to see the stars you told me about last night. ...I said we could always wait until we were back on the Musashi, but you said viewing the stars is surprisingly difficult because the Musashi is moving."

They must have decided on this after mutually compromising and making excuses.

*...It would be wrong to interrupt them...*

The odds were good they would not even notice if she did interrupt, but she wanted them to make a nice memory here. What happened tomorrow was a different matter.

But at some point, the Secretary, Ohiroshiki, and Persona-kun had showed up too. And then someone stepped out of the central tent.

"Okay, let's get going then. Tenzou, you show the way."

It was the Chancellor.

They must have already had plans. And then he noticed her.

"Oh? Are you coming too, Adele? I thought it was just going to be us guys, but now Mary's coming too. ...Uqui, what about your wife?"

"She says I am enough to fill the armored position."

"She sure is cement-like... Anyway, what about you, Adele?"

"Oh, um, I'm on guard duty. ...But if you catch anything neat, let me see, okay?"

"Sure thing," said the Chancellor as he opened the entrance to his tent.

The Vicereine, Kimi, and the Reine des Garous were inside with perfectly composed expressions. Plus...

"M-my king, are you going?"

"Well, that was the plan... But should I stay?"

"No!" added Asama. She forced a smile with an awkward sweat that had already reached the critical point. "I-I think you should go. Because we're going to be busy soon!"

"That really worries me... Hey, Horizon?"

"What is it? Do you want me to hit you again?"

"No, it's just that we seem to be in agreement, or we're two sides of the same coin, or we're facing in the same direction, or however you want to put it."

"Judge. ...We stand in opposite positions, but that is what brings us together."

"Yeah, that's it."

Adele realized something from the Chancellor's satisfied nod and proud stance.

*...He seems so much more dependable with Vicereine Horizon.*

He would sometimes get in trouble when the Vicereine chose to give one of his jokes a serious response, but he generally seemed to do things right around her.

That must have been because his questions were more or less directed at himself.

He had promised to retrieve her emotions and had said he was willing to conquer the world to do so.

The Vicereine was at the foundation of that, he stood on a line parallel to hers, and they had introduced the idea of the borderline. That was not something he could forget.

And that was why they would occasionally hold a conversation that seemed meant to reaffirm that.

This was the same. It was a small thing, but they were reaffirming each other. The quick exchange of questions proved that they were still functioning for each other.

Adele did not know if that was a good or bad thing. But...

"So, Horizon, you decide where I'll be sleeping. I'll be out having some fun."

"Ho ho? And what if you get back to find your blanket outside?"

"W-we wouldn't let her do that."

"I was waiting for that."

The Vicereine gave the 5th Special Duty Officer a thumbs up and then faced the Chancellor again.

"I do have some thoughts about who holds responsibility here. I will be sorting out those thoughts here, so you feel free to head out. ...In a way, we are parallel on this as well, Toori-sama."

Adele sighed after seeing their tent close.

The Chancellor sighed as well. Adele noticed the relief in that breath, so...

"Chancellor."

"Ah? What is it, Adele?"

"I think I understand now why it isn't just you and Vicereine Horizon and why you included Asama-san and the 5th Special Duty Officer in your battle formation."

"Hold on now." He smiled bitterly. "I'm pretty sure I know why too."

He pointed towards those walking toward the forest as a "I'll be there soon" gesture. Then he scratched his head with the bitter smile still on his lips.

"It's because there are a lot of things I care about and that matter to me, right?"

"If you told them that, I know it would make the Vicereine, Asama-san, and the 5th Special Duty Officer happy. ...Kimi too. And Suzu-san, yes. I guarantee it."

"I can't, I can't." He started walking away and stumbled over a rock as he did so. "I'm an entertainer, so I want a better way of expressing it. That's one of the ways I show my reliability. ...Do you understand, Adele?"

There was now one less person in the tent.

Asama found that had calmed things down quite a bit.

So she asked a question.

It was what she had started asking before.

It was a difficult question to ask in front of him because it could apply to them as well.

But she wanted to hear what Mitotsudaira's mother had to say as someone with more experience in such things.

"Can I ask something, Mito's mom? ...I know you have your current life because you and Mito's dad got together, but..."

What about this?

"What would you have done if your husband had also loved someone else back then?"

# **Chapter 11: Wife at a Mini Meeting**

# 第十一章

## 『小会議場の夫人』



それは相手を<sup>と</sup>知る<sup>こと</sup>  
それは自分を知る<sup>こと</sup>  
それは互い<sup>を</sup>結ぶ<sup>もの</sup>  
配点 (贈り物)

*It is to know the other person*

*It is to know yourself*

*It binds you two together*

### **Point Allocation (Gift)**

"Yes, that is a fascinating question. ...What would I have done if my husband had also loved someone else back then?"

The Reine des Garous used her words to preface her thoughts.

She thought it was an interesting hypothetical.

It was hypothetical and about the past, so there was no point in thinking about it. But...

*...It is important for all of you now.*

And a smile formed on her lips as she looked to the Asama Shrine Representative sitting in front of her.

*...You don't need to worry.*

In a way, that was a dangerous question. It could be interpreted as looking back and sullyng her memories.

But it had to do with her daughter and the girl asking it was serious. So...

"That is a good question."

The Reine des Garous found she had taken a liking to Asama.

*...She takes things very seriously.*

But that was not the only reason she liked her. There were a few different reasons.

First, she had not called her the Reine des Garous. Ever since they had met, she had referred to her as "Mitotsudaira's mom" due to the relationship with her daughter.

Being called the Reine des Garous was not a bad thing. As Musashi's Vice President had said, she would soon be Musashi's enemy. So it was normal to

use that realistic title that severed any closer connection.

But this girl was different.

Asama kept referring to her as her friend's mother. She realized her daughter's king had also been calling her "maman", so that must have been how this group viewed it. That would explain why she had been in such a good mood inside this tent.

And the other reason...

*...This girl restrains herself a lot.*

That reminded the Reine des Garous of herself in the past.

Long ago, she had found every excuse she could to avoid feeling "love" for her future husband.

Yet every evening when he did not visit, she had taken out the clothes and other gifts he had given her and just looked at them.

She had sniffed at the bed he had used, sat in the chair he had used, daydreamed about the next time he could visit, and snacked on the sauce he had made for her.

Even while enjoying herself like that, she had avoided thinking that she "loved" him.

This girl would not enjoy the boy's absence like that. Because this boy was so close by. But that meant the enjoyment of his presence never ended and she had grown numb to it. So...

"Tomo...was it?"

"Oh, yes."

*Such a silly girl.*

*If my daughter's king is letting you wash some of his clothes and prepare some of his food, that means he's leaving his thoughts and everyday life with you.*

She had gone numb and failed to notice her own situation.

That was why she hesitated.

The Reine des Garous knew she should really be supporting her daughter here, but...

"From the looks of things, that princess is doing a good job of managing my daughter's king. So reliability should not be an issue."

"Judge. I am an automaton, so I love acting as the gear that supports our controlled society."

She was quite the incredible princess, but nothing short of this could fully restrain that king.

*...He was quite something when he visited before too, wasn't he?*

She had never imagined anyone would escape the temptation of the Reine des Garous's hunger.

That told her something about this girl and her daughter who that princess had accepted in.

*...They have a connection even greater than my temptation.*

So she spoke.

"Tomo? You asked what I would have done if my husband had loved someone else back then, right? I might be tempted to say I could never stand that, but I think I will instead say I would allow it."

She sensed her daughter's back tense at that.

But she continued on regardless.

"Listen. ...I know I couldn't restrain myself even in that case. Although it would depend who it was."

"Listen," said the Reine des Garous again while thinking back to that time.

From time to time, he had mentioned a classmate girl of his.

"He was popular, you know?"

And who had that girl been?

*...Yes, I certainly never imagined she was someone who supported the entirety*

*of Hexagone Française.*

But as someone who lived in the present that girl had given them, she could praise her.

"That girl was sickly, petite, and short in both height and temper. But as I listened to him talk about her, I lost confidence in what I had thought were my strongest points: my strength, my figure, my height, and my relaxed attitude."

So she had sighed countless times while he was away.

"I couldn't tell you how many times I wondered if he actually loved her."

But...

"I didn't give up." A smile naturally formed. "So I started thinking I was fine with being 'Miss Loup-Garou in the Forest' to him. ...What happened outside the forest didn't matter. It wouldn't matter if he married her as long as he still came to visit me. After all, he was from *outside the forest*."

"M-mother." Her daughter made a half rotation. "That's like being strangers! Could you really stand never being any closer than that!?"

"Nate? Your father tells me I haven't changed at all since back then."

"...Are you sure there isn't something wrong with him?"

"He is perfectly normal. I mean, when I go the extra mile, he'll say I've gotten a lot better at it than I used to be while he cries tears of joy and-..."

"Ahhhh!! That's enough of that!"

*My daughter certainly is talking back to her mother more than she used to.*

But she rotated her daughter back around and said something else.

"Listen, Nate."

"...Are you using me like a toy?"

"You shouldn't say that about yourself."

"I notice you didn't deny the accusation!"

"Now, now." The Reine des Garous slapped her daughter's shoulders. "Listen. I was chosen by your father. ...And that means I fit his tastes better. Because he

said I'm 'pretty and cool'."

The "sickly, petite, and short" description of the rival girl applied to him as well.

So to him, someone so similar was someone he had a mutual understanding with and who he could talk with, but not someone he looked up to and admired.

But even if that had not been the case...

"I had so much fun back then."

So, she added in her heart as she looked to her daughter's friend.

"Even if I wasn't chosen, my love would not have stopped. ...I would have made him mine alone for as long as he was with me. And if that led to any jealousy, well..."

She leaned in to her daughter's ear and brought her tongue to her lips.

She made a clear licking sound.

"I would put my scent on him to tell her that he was mine. With any luck, she would be the type to enjoy that kind of game."

Mitotsudaira groaned in her heart with her back still turned to her mother.

*...She noticed that before?*

When her king had been abducted at IZUMO, she had gone to rescue him and then met up with her mother. During a nighttime carriage ride, she had noticed her mother's scent on her king.

Her mother had most likely licked him.

Unable to bear that, she had rubbed her cheek against him to remove her mother's scent.

*...Sh-she didn't notice, did she?*

Her mother had been driving the carriage and had been enjoying their rampage through the night with Naito. *Oh, night and Naito? Hee hee. I'm*

*turning into Masazumi. Which must mean I'm done for.*

But just as she tried to avoid reality by losing herself in thought...

"To be *chosen* does not mean to be selected like an object. It means to make a part of his feelings your own and keep him from ever forgetting about you." Her mother looked to Asama. "Once you've done that, he will send you gifts. But not to say 'look what I can buy' as a way of demonstrating his worth. These gifts say 'this is the kind of person I think you are' as a form of worship that carries his feelings for you."

She knew what her mother meant.

*...For example, if he gives you clothing as a gift...*

It was not the price tag or value that mattered. It was a way of saying "I think you are like this clothing".

Asama and Horizon must have understood because they nodded a few times.

Then Asama asked a question.

"Mito's mom, how was it for you?"

"For me?"

*...Oh, she looks happy.*

Everyone enjoyed talking about themselves. When asked to do so, her mother first took a breath to calm herself.

"After I met my husband, he would give me clothing and bring me food every time he visited. He would also tell me how to cook and about the outside world. It was all meant to show off his feelings for me. ...He gave me things he thought were pretty and enjoyable and that means he thought I was pretty and enjoyable. ...Because I understood that, I could spread those clothes out on the floor and bask in their presence and I could enjoy that food so much. It let me know just how much he worshiped me."

"Heh heh. I'm glad to see you didn't misunderstand."

Kimi let go of Asama's hips and sat up.

She looked to Horizon and then Mitotsudaira's mother.

"When a good woman takes a liking to someone, she will say they have such similar tastes. And even if they don't, she wouldn't be dumb enough to not accept that she is being called pretty through the other person's gifts. I mean, that would be like saying she wasn't pretty."

"Th-then what is she supposed to say when she receives a gift like that?"

Mitotsudaira asked Kimi the question that had occurred to her.

The idiot sister narrowed her eyes as she responded.

"You just have to say thank you."

"That's enough?"

"It is." A smile formed in those narrowed eyes. "After all, it took courage to give that gift. ...Listen. What you find pretty or lovely is based on your own values. You have to show people what those are, so they put in an effort to gain a consensus through that gift. That isn't something that happens to you every day. It's not an easy thing to do, so you should be thankful for it."

*Kimi really has a way with words, thought Asama.*

But she also saw Mitotsudaira clench her hands as they rested on the floor.

And she noticed something about her fingers.

*...Ah.*

They were manicured.

In England, Mitotsudaira had failed to achieve victory in her first duel with Walsingham in London.

In the previous battles and in their primitive life on the transport ship where she had given into her wild side... *Is saying that going too far? I guess it doesn't matter.* At any rate, all of that had damaged her nails.

To repair and reinforce her nails, he had given her a manicure.

He had colored them cool white.

The color of the moon.

"..."

Yes, thought Asama with a mental nod.

Before that, she had never decorated her nails because it might dull her sense of touch. But she had decorated them ever since.

Why had she done that? Mitotsudaira may have done it subconsciously and probably could not have explained her reasons if she had tried.

But she had just found the answer.

How did he feel about his wolf knight and how did she feel about herself?

She hung her head and her bangs hung down, but her face was red and her mouth was loose. Her heart must have been racing and she must have been sweating because her yukata seemed plastered to her skin.

But Asama had a thought as she watched that wolf.

*...Horizon is the same too, isn't she?*

He was giving Horizon her emotions as a gift. And the entire world along with them.

That showed off what kind of girl he thought Horizon was.

It was exactly the gift he had said he would give her back at Mikawa.

Both the knight and the princess were receiving a gift from the king.

*...That must be nice...*

*I wish I had a gift.*

*Or just anything really.*

"...Uuh."

She felt pathetic.

*This is bad*, thought Asama.

Very, very bad.

It was bad that she was comparing herself to others, but it was especially bad

that a shrine maiden was begging for something.

In contrast to Mitotsudaira's red blush, she grew pale.

But she did have a question about this.

All she ever seemed to be for him was someone who did his laundry and got him released from the guard stations, but...

"U-um, Mito's mom?"

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure if you would call it a gift, but if someone has you do their laundry and look after them, such as freeing them after an arrest, what does that mean? That isn't saying you're lovely or pretty, is it?"

She just threw the words out there.

And she immediately received an "oh, dear" in response.

Mitotsudaira's mother smiled as she answered.

"When I met my husband, it was only a small thing, but he caught a cold and I looked after him while he recovered. And he let me do it. ...During our trysts afterwards, he would also let me do his laundry and whatnot..."

"You mean...?"

"Yes. He was giving me his everyday life as a gift. Meaning..."

Meaning...

"Between a man and a woman, that's a way of saying you want to live with them."

*Eh?* thought Asama.

*...W-wait? Live with them? Um, hello?*

She thought about what that had to mean, she pondered it, and she contemplated it.

"————"

She started to place a lid on it and she stopped moving.



Kimi saw Asama freeze up just like Mitotsudaira.

*...Oh, dear. Oh, dear.*

She found the change in her two friends so amusing because this confirmed their feelings.

But it was unusual for Asama to end up like this.

Mitotsudaira had the clear relationship between knight and king, so that relationship would occasionally rise to the surface. And Mitotsudaira herself understood what that relationship was.

But Asama had placed a lid on her feelings.

She would have reached the point of deciding to respond if Kimi's brother made some kind of approach.

But that approach did not have to be a verbal thing.

If words were necessary, then no one could be bound with someone who could not speak.

And that was clearly not the case because some people had a thing for animals.

**Wise Sister:** "Isn't that right, Adele!? Isn't that right!?"

**Flat Vassal:** "I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm just going to say no!"

**Wise Sister:** "Then Date Narumi! How about you!?"

**Gold Mar:** "...Oh! So that's what this is about!"

**Mal-Ga:** "Eh? W-wait, Margot. What's it about?"

**Mary:** "Um, is it something that applies to Master Tenzou?"

**Wise Sister:** "Probably, if two conditions were met."

**Unturning:** "...I don't eat leftovers."

**Gold Mar:** "Oh, so close! But it's not about leftovers! Maybe more related to table scraps?"

**Mal-Ga:** Eh? Margot, another! Give me another hint!"

**Flat Vassal:** "I don't eat leftovers either!"

**Hori-ko:** "Oh? Adele-sama, you have often bought the Blue Thunder's 'Leftovers - Silver' meal over the past year."

**Uqui:** "Hm, so Narumi also disapproves of eating leftovers..."

**Novice:** "And Balfette-kun does eat them. Is that it?"

**Tachibana Wife:** "Master Muneshige, what about the curry we had for dinner?"

**Tachibana Husband:** "Not to worry, Gin. Curry tastes better when it is allowed to cook for several days, so 'leftovers' isn't really the right word."

**Tonbokiri:** "You seem to be enjoying yourselves, but what are you talking about?"

**Bell:** "I-I can't...say. I can't say."

**Hori-ko:** "Simply put, it is wrong that Adele-sama eats leftovers, so we are asking for a hint."

**Vice President:** "It's so hard to get by without money, isn't it? I know your pain."

**Flat Vassal:** "Please stop sympathizing with me over a twisted interpretation of events!"

At least everyone had plenty of energy.

But Mitotsudaira managed to take some deep breaths and recover while she watched that exchange.

"Asama."

The other girl, however, was dead.

Kimi looked to Asama.

Asama was hanging her head, viewing a sign frame, and performing a linefeed or some other kind of work, but her brain was not functioning.

Hanami stood on her head and used a cooling spell, but Hanami herself was

functioning as a radiator and had shimmering heat rising from her.

*...She's lost.*

Until now, she would have thought there was nothing between her and Kimi's brother.

At least not coming from the other direction. Even if she had her own feelings, she would have assumed they were unrequited and closed them up.

Especially after Horizon had arrived.

In the past, she had spoken with him like normal and been even closer to him than now, but starting sometime the previous year, she had seemed to set up some boundaries for herself.

She had placed a lid on her feelings.

She had concluded that, at least for the time being, she had not been chosen. So she had put a lid on them so as not to bother anyone until she had been clearly chosen.

But that was not the case.

Relationships were not words or objects. Signs and symbols could provide certainty, but the actual relationship was not made of such things.

It was an invisible line binding the two of them. It was simply there with them and remained no matter how far apart they were.

A flower blooms on the summit.

Even without putting that to words, it became apparent through the repeated attempts to climb the mountain. Eventually, the mountain climbing challenge would change from "a flower blooms on the summit" to "a flower awaits on the summit".

So Kimi could only think of her friend in one way:

*...Silly girl.*

*You know what, Asama? You're contradicting yourself.*

*You can only relax and enjoy your current situation because you trust that your relationship will endure even if you put a lid on it.*

*But if you can trust in a relationship even when you put a lid on it, then it must be a powerful relationship indeed.*

*The temperature outside and inside the lid is the same, you know? But...*

"———"

Asama had completely short-circuited.

Kimi had known this would happen eventually, but it was even more wonderful than she had imagined.

*...Way to go, Mito's mom.*

Was this thanks to the woman's many years of experience? It had only taken her this long to see through to what mattered to Mitotsudaira and Asama and what they saw as most important in their relationship with Kimi's brother.

She had to have been watching them carefully during the campfire meeting in the clearing earlier.

She had a perceptive eye.

Everyone in Class Plum knew each other well enough to never overlook each other's actions or signs, but they accepted those things as normal and could overlook their significance. In a way, their relationships had already been exposed to each other.

And that left them weak to having someone point them out anew.

When they learned that their normal actions appeared special when viewed by others, they would feel a sense of superiority, surprise, and an awkward unease like they had made a mistake.

That had to be what Asama was feeling now.

Mito's mom had also chosen her words well.

She had said "everyday life".

Asama had been taught household skills by her mother, she had inherited and protected those things, and she had built them up in her own way. Those were personal things for her, contrasting with her official Shinto duties.

Those things were hers alone.

If his gift to her was leaving her in charge of his everyday life, then he was not viewing her as the Asama Shrine Representative or as the Genocide Archer. He was simply viewing her as a girl.

That must have been unexpected for her. She had underestimated herself as someone less important.

*...And this has pinpoint accuracy.*

If he had been viewing her as Shinto or a fighter, she could have said there were others who could fill that role.

But Asama could not say that here.

Kimi knew nothing could have made Asama happier.

And that was why she had "frozen".

"Hey, Asama?"

"Y-yes..."

Asama nodded and Kimi knew what that "yes" was in response to.

Across from them, Mitotsudaira was taking deep breaths and hoping no one had noticed, but her mom smiled behind her.

*...That's a smile that says she understands.*

Kimi realized that woman must have had a time when she was like Asama and Mitotsudaira.

And for her, the person she cared for had not been with her.

Kimi had of course had a similar period of time. A time when her brother was not by her side.

During times like that, anyone would think about the person who was not with them.

They would remember that person's mannerisms, words, and breathing, hear those things in the house's creaking and other background noises, and suddenly get up in the middle of the night.

They would open the front door and look out into the night to see if that

person was there.

Mito's mom must have done the same thing.

Kimi understood.

She could tell the distance between them was gradually shrinking.

"Asama?"

"I'm going to sleep."

Asama suddenly threw her blanket over her head so Kimi could not see her face.

She became a blanket mountain and took up her usual spot in the tent.

She was next to Horizon, but closer than the night before.

"C-c'mon, everyone, we have an early morning tomorrow."

Her trembling voice sounded on the verge of tears and everyone exchanged a glance.

Horizon gave Kimi and Mito's mom a thumbs up and Mitotsudaira smiled a little.

They were relieved for Asama.

She was going to keep that lid on for a while longer, but the feelings inside had learned what things were like on the outside.

And just as Kimi began hoping she would let those out soon...

"Hey, I'm back!"

Her brother opened the tent's entrance and climbed in.

Kimi looked to her brother's face.

He turned to Horizon and nodded. Then he faced Asama's blanket.

"Oh, so you decided on a spot for me."

Horizon gave him a thumbs up and asked an expressionless question.

"Are you finished hunting bugs?"

"Judge. We went around to the most promising trees and Uqui was delighted. It's star-viewing time now, but that's mostly a Tenzou and Mary thing and we thought it'd be best to let them be alone together."

"Judge. We had something to discuss without you around, Toori-sama, but it can always wait until tomorrow."

"What were you talking about?"

Asama's blanket seemed to shrink down.

She had tensed up.

But Horizon answered calmly.

"That is a shared secret."

"D-damn, it's not fun when you're on the receiving end of that one!"

"Oh, what's this? Feeling jealous of your obvious superior? Does it pain you that much that I have stolen Asama-sama and Mitotsudaira-sama from you?"

"A-a shared secret should be shared with everyone."

"My king, that makes no sense even if you do act like a child."

Mitotsudaira was exactly right. But...

...*Asama*?

The blanket was laughing.

And without saying a word, Kimi's brother moved next to Asama. He swapped places with Horizon.

Asama's blanket trembled in surprise just once when she detected his presence.

"...Toori-kun?"

"Yeah. My spot is next to Asama today."

Asama did not ask him why.

"I-I see," she said.

Then the blanket slowly nodded.

"...Yes."

It still was not clear what that "yes" was in response to, but Kimi thought she understood how Asama felt.

Asama had accepted the "sleeping" part of everyday life.

It was not exactly a glamorous gift, but...

*...It's still nice.*

At home, Kimi and her brother would sometimes fall asleep together when they played a game or read manga late into the night.

But that happened naturally, so what did it feel like to emotionally "accept it" like this?

And Kimi also heard a blanket moving on the other side of the tent.

Mito's mom took a breath.

"Now, we have an early morning and so much to do tomorrow, so let's get to sleep."

"Judge. Mother, that means you're going to be busy tomorrow, doesn't it? Doesn't it!?"

"Testament. It very much does. ...I need to bring your father and then spend the night with you in what will be your new home."

Mitotsudaira froze in place as she tried to spread her blanket out on the floor.

"Wh-what does that mean!?"

Mitotsudaira saw her mother tilt her head.

"Oh? Nate, aren't you moving in with that king of yours soon? I was thinking I could bring your father to the Musashi tomorrow and spend the night there as a greeting."

"I have no idea what you're talking about!"

She really did not.

It was always some kind of wonderland inside her mother's brain, but this was

especially bad.

However, her mother straightened her tilted head and placed her hands on Mitotsudaira's shoulders.

"Surely you aren't planning to throw your parents out in the cold."

"Just to be clear, it's summer and the Musashi has air-conditioning."

"You mean you're going to make us spend the night in one of Musashi's parks? But your father is so frail he might get sick. I'll just have to keep him warm all night long."

*...I imagine father would have an...eventful night if he was stuck outdoors with mother...*

"Mother, did you just start to plan out what you would do if that happened?"

"Don't be silly, Nate. I don't need to plan it out when we've done that countless times before."

"Ho ho? Mitotsudaira-sama's mother must be the outdoorsy type."

"Testament. Life outside is so exciting and fulfilling."

It was scary how she could hold a conversation like this.

But Mitotsudaira had something to say.

"You can just stay in the diplomat's quarters. That would be the normal arrangement."

"But Terumoto will be staying there. Since you have a meeting on the Musashi planned for tomorrow," said her mother. "Also, your house was destroyed, Nate, so we can't stay there. Isn't that why you were planning to stay at your king's house starting tomorrow?"

For the umpteenth time that day, she felt the blood rush from her face.

*...H-how does she know about that!?*

"Hee hee? Nate? You are a knight sent by Hexagone Française, remember? If your house on the Musashi is squished flat, the Hexagone Française embassy on the Musashi will of course notify us."

"What did...they say...?"

"Testament. That Hexagone Française Knight Nate Mitotsudaira's house was fully destroyed during a battle. They also asked for the funding to rebuild your house."

Yes.

"We refused, of course."

Mitotsudaira's mother placed her hands on Mitotsudaira's shoulders.

"Go for it, Nate. Even if his right and left sides are already taken, climbing into his lap and having him pamper you there seems to be more your style, so just do that."

"What!? Where did that misinformation come from!?"

"Eh? For reference, I bought all the books based on you for sale at Musashi's mail-order doujinshi shop, Melon no Ana, and about 70% of it was that."

**Silver Wolf:** "Naruze! This is your doing, isn't it!?"

**Mal-Ga:** "Huh? What? I can think of so many things you might be talking about that mentioning the wrong one would be a bad idea, so I'm not going to respond. Knowing how to endure hardship is important, Mitotsudaira."

**Silver Wolf:** "Must you be so stubborn!?"

What was she supposed to do?

But trying to fight it would only make it worse. And when she looked toward her king...

"I will join you as well," said Horizon.

She was thankful for that. Horizon would act as a buffer and she could face Mitotsudaira's mother without fear.

And when she looked up...

...*Oh*.

Past her king, Asama had stuck her head out from under her blanket.

Mitotsudaira's king noticed her gaze and turned toward Asama.

"Oh?" There was a smile in his voice. "Has Ama-no-Iwato opened?"

"We're a Sakuya shrine."

She looked away and pulled the blanket up again, but not over her head this time.

She hid just her face and lay on her side with her cheek and neck resting on his arm.

When Mitotsudaira saw this...

*...This is what my complaints look like from the outside, isn't it?*

She decided to ask just to be sure.

"My king, are you okay with this?"

"Ah? Yeah, I kinda want to meet your Papan. I mean, I've gotta see what kind of guy can outdo your Maman."

Mitotsudaira sensed her mother's good mood behind her.

*...Honestly.*

*My mother likes my king even more than me.*

But it was true her house had been destroyed. They would not be able to stay at the diplomat's quarters and they couldn't stay at the Asama Shrine either. And as a knight, Mitotsudaira felt it would be wrong to have them borrow a student dorm room.

*...Oh, I'm making excuses to build up a justification for staying at my king's house.*

Once she realized that, she moved over next to Horizon.

There was something she needed to say.

"Whatever may happen, we can set everything straight starting tomorrow."

She heard her mother laugh, but she did not let it bother her.

"Takigawa-san. I know this is no time for laughter, but still."

"What is it, Kakei Juuzou. And Mochizuki Yukitada."

Kakei nodded when she called his name.

There was a deep cut in the brim of his hat which shook from the movement of his head.

The eye visible through the cut briefly glanced in her direction.

This place was made from white plaster. It bore the precipitous peak and horns emblem of the Houjou Association of Indian States and the walls and floor were made from blocks of hardened earth.

Several mats had been laid out on the floor and plates of hardened leaves were lined up on those.

This was a dining hall.

And Takigawa was eating a late dinner there.

"You aren't here to laugh at me for eating a lassi parfait, are you?"

"I don't have time for that. Well, it is pretty funny, but..."

Kakei raised his right hand and sat across from Takigawa. He then produced the tray he had been hiding behind his back.

And it held...

"I'm eating a banana parfait."

"It doesn't come with a gator?"

"Take a closer look at the container."

The wood container was carved to look like an alligator with its mouth open.

"...They have a container exclusively for that dish?"

"When I got it at the counter, a local with a fake-sounding accent said, 'Use right hand! Three fingers, yes!?' But there's no way I can do that, so I asked for a spoon."

"They said the same thing to me."

"Then it must be a standard gag," said Mochizuki. "Now, Takigawa-sama..."

"Shaja." Takigawa nodded and took a breath. "The 1st Siege of Ueda happened yesterday."

"Testament. ...I heard it was at Hashiba's request. And that Sanada Nobushige will receive a warm welcome in exchange."

"Then," said Takigawa. "What will you do, Ten Braves? There's something else that matters to you and you're here to negotiate over it, right? You want to show me your worth to benefit Sanada. ...So what do you have to offer? I'm looking for someone I can buy cheaply. So," she said. "Let's talk."

# Chapter 12: Sitters of the Late Night Shift

## 第十二章

### 『深夜番の座り人達』



焦りが人を急かす行く先は  
いつも慈悲か破滅か  
配点 (踏み込み)

*Impatience always rushes people*

*Toward mercy or ruin*

### **Point Allocation (Take the First Step)**

Kakei took a breath in the Houjou ship's dining hall.

The breath prepared him for the coming negotiation.

"Now, then."

He could smell strong spices and there was a lot of a unique sort of humidity.

He sat cross-legged. Sitting on the floor in a dining hall was unusual, but the Houjou Association of Indian States must have been following the Indian style.

It was a way of reducing stress on the warship and thus helped keep morale high.

So even on a ship, Kakei felt dirt below his butt. Blocks of packed soil were used as floor panels. That seemed unsanitary for a dining hall, but...

*...Well, they'll be easy to replace, they'll absorb moisture, and they probably have some kind of disinfectant in them.*

He performed that pointless analysis because he was a ninja spy.

But that was not his role here.

With Mochizuki behind him for support, he was here for...

"Let's get to the negotiations. You want to use three of the Sanada Ten Braves, so let's work out a deal."

Takigawa sat across from him. She too was cross-legged.

And she nodded. She did not smile, but she did not glare either. It was a flat expression.

"I intend to use you as mere mercenaries. ...That's what I've done so far. Isn't it a little odd to suddenly raise your price through negotiations?"

The corners of Takigawa's mouth rose a bit.

She was smiling.

And Kakei could only think of one reason why.

*...She's drawn out the starting line.*

This was still the beginning and they should enjoy this. That was what she meant. She was facing a losing battle, but...

*...I do understand.*

Gathering and adjusting battle forces was uniquely enjoyable. It was the same as trying to decide what weapon to use before heading to the battlefield.

You were constructing yourself, searching yourself, and arranging yourself in the best possible form. That process and its results were enjoyable.

Which meant one thing about what Takigawa had just said.

"Thanks, Takigawa-san."

"Thanks for what?"

"That's simple enough," said Kakei. "We're still trying to figure out what the other is negotiating for, but you're still willing to view our skill as a 'weapon'."

Kakei defined himself and the others.

"You are an important P.A. Oda retainer and you said we are a 'weapon'. A weapon is wielded by someone, so you've said that we're worthy of being wielded."

He defined them through his words.

Even if they were rejected or overturned, words were a definition.

And negotiations were composed of words.

*...Anayama-san was always talking about this.*

Kakei belatedly wished he had done more negotiation training. And he was certain he would wish the same thing countless times over the next half hour or so.

"Mochizuki, back me up here, okay?"

"Shall I assist you? Shall I support you?"

"Can't you figure it out on your own?"

"Testament. Then I shall do what I have determined is best. ...Shall I negotiate in your place?"

"Wow, do I look that bad at this?"

But that was just who he was.

He knew he was not the kind of person who should be doing this.

But he also knew he had to do it here.

They could reach an agreement more easily in the current circumstances and that would benefit Sanada.

"We will assist you," he said to Takigawa.

"I will hear you out."

She did not accept the term "assist". That meant she would not view them as "assistance".

She was saying she had no intention of being indebted to them.

Her stance was that Sanada helping Oda and Hashiba was the natural state of things.

But he could not allow that.

He ignored her implicit rejection of the word "assist" and kept going.

"As a reward for our assistance, please have Hashiba protect Sanada until the Osaka Campaign."

That was what they truly wanted.

Takigawa picked up a nearby container.

It contained a yogurt drink. It was a whey drink with as much fat as possible removed from it, so it was supposedly quite refreshing when you were tired. The guy at the counter had said 'Refreshed! You feel refreshed!', but she was not sure how much she believed it. For one thing, it seemed odd to name the

menu item Lassi Kimura<sup>[4]</sup> even if it matched some historical chef's name. Kimura apparently meant strawberry flavor.

But Takigawa took a sip.

*...Oh, it is refreshing.*

With that in mind, she thought about Kakei's request.

"...You want protection for Sanada until the Osaka Campaign?"

"Testament. It's not a bad deal. Besides, the 1st Siege of Ueda was at Hashiba's request and Nobushige's faction is getting a warm welcome in exchange. We're only asking for you to protect Sanada as a part of that."

"It's not like you have any authority over Sanada." Takigawa spoke in a testing manner. "And that warm welcome was only for Nobushige's faction. Not Sanada as a whole."

"Oh, so you do understand. *That's the point.*" Kakei pointed at himself with his thumb. "I'm talking about Sanada's land. ...If you don't protect that, then it's all pointless. Think of it as a request from Sanada being delivered via you."

"What about the fact that you have no authority in this matter?"

"Testament." Kakei nodded. "Do you really think Masayuki-san and the others with authority are going to say no to having Sanada's people protected? It can be an empty promise, but we want to define our value as fighters."

He took a breath before continuing.

"That's what we really want."

"Listen," Takigawa heard Kakei say. "At the end of the Osaka Campaign, Sanada's forces charge on Matsudaira. We reach their main forces and make it all the way to the center."

She was aware of that. It was described in the Testament.

That had demonstrated Sanada's courage and established a high opinion of them in later generations.

"How about it?" asked Kakei. "If you protect us, all of Sanada's warriors can

undergo special training for the Osaka Campaign during that time."

But he was not done speaking.

"For Hashiba, this is a Testament description they can use for a guaranteed attack on Matsudaira. And even if we happen to 'take Matsudaira's head' while we're at it, it can always be interpreted around."

How about it?

"During the Osaka Campaign, Hashiba has its forces worn down by Matsudaira. That means Hashiba will lose powerful people to betrayal and hesitation." Kakei sat up straight. "Sanada will not betray Hashiba. ...So can't you do as we ask here?"

*...Not good...*

Kakei was sweating in his heart.

He had made some decent bluffs, but there was no way to guarantee any of it.

And he had hidden and glossed over everything inconvenient to them.

He was really hoping Takigawa could completely forget the first half of what he said.

Would that be possible?

*...No, I guess not...*

"Kakei-sama, that was quite forceful, but I think you did express our main selling points."

Mochizuki used the brief pause to covertly speak to him using a ninja technique.

"Can't you look at this positively?"

*...A lot of help you are...*

He was glad Unno was fast asleep in the bed she had been given. He hated to think what this would be like with both of them criticizing him.

But Mochizuki was right about one thing.

He had listed off their strong points.

"You know the biggest advantage of protecting Sanada, don't you?"

It was...

"Sanada is your surefire attack against Matsudaira during the Osaka Campaign. And on the same level as Shimazu during Sekigahara."

Kakei hid the lack of confidence in his heart as he formed the words. And he thought, *Before long, P.A. Oda will have to perform the history recreation of Nobunaga's assassination during the Honnouji Incident.*

Hashiba would conquer the Far East after that, but they would later decline.

The Hashiba forces would scatter and split into an east and west side after Hashiba's death.

Then the Battle of Sekigahara would be fought as a preliminary battle to the final showdown and it would all end at the Osaka Campaign.

So...

"You can preserve an entire nation of reliable forces for the final battle. Can't you do that for us?" said Kakei. "We will help you *here*. We will fight on the front line and ensure you're capable of preserving us. And in exchange for preserving Sanada, we'll stubbornly protect you. Isn't that good enough?"

He was aware he was making up his argument as he went along, but deep in his heart, something else was apparent to him.

*...Most of what I'm saying is true.*

Did that mean his god was watching over him?

But this was still important. After all...

*...Sanada is a small nation.*

*...Small nations are in such a difficult position.*

Kakei thought about the nation of Sanada.

It was a small, mountainous nation.

It was deep in the forest and deep in the mountains. The summers were short and the winters snowy.

But it was an important point along a major land shipping route.

That allowed them to engage in intermediary trade, but it also meant other nations invaded or intervened a lot, so they had to spend their accumulated money on defense and surviving the winters.

In that land, it was difficult to take back what had been lost.

So they could not afford to lose anything.

*That* was the most important thing to them: Sanada's land.

After losing their old home and wandering around the Far East, it was in Sanada that they had felt "this is the place".

They had felt they could live there without losing anything.

"...Honestly."

Kakei looked at Takigawa.

She was an important P.A. Oda retainer, so she most likely knew their history.

After all, they had originally been P.A. Oda residents.

They were from Osaka.

A few people had already inherited names for some of the Hashiba's Seven Spears and the people connected to them, but they had attended a school meant to train candidates to inherit the other names.

Even if they left the school for individual reasons, the skilled ones had gathered focus and been given a helping hand. Since they would have been inheriting the names of people connected to Hashiba, it made sense that the nation would work to assist them.

A lot had happened with Kakei himself, but he had been selected as a likely candidate.

A total of ten had been gathered and they had all thought their various

futures were assured.

But at some point, a new group of candidates had appeared and they had been defeated.

Then they had begun wandering.

They could have stayed and worked as leaders in a lower organization under Hashiba's direct command. But...

*...That just didn't seem the same...*

There had been an alternative for them after they lost their role, but it had felt wrong.

They had wondered if they even felt at home there anymore.

They had later realized the answer was no.

But at the time, they had simply wanted something equivalent. And if they could not get that, they wanted a new home that let them confidently say "this is the place".

If only they could have felt at home and said "this is the place" about that lower position that had been prepared for them.

But they had found they could not.

Those defeated ten had all hoped to make a comeback and had all wanted the same thing.

They wanted some other place and some other time.

They had wanted somewhere where the place itself seemed to want them.

And once they had begun wandering, they discovered how large P.A. Oda was. No matter where they went, they never seemed to leave P.A. Oda.

After spending half a year crossing mountains and deserts, they realized something.

*...We came from such a gigantic place.*

So what kind of future had they felt was in store for them as name inheritors close to Hashiba?

There was only one thing Kakei could say about that:

"We don't know what it's like to be accepted by a large nation."

That was right.

When you were needed by a large nation, you were also protected by its presence and its rules.

The nation's size alone would begin to make it inviolable. So...

"But small nations really do need people like us fighting for them."

They could not swap out their fighting force like a large nation could.

"If we're lost, it's all over," said Kakei. "So how about it, Takigawa-san?"

He threw the words out there and received an immediate response. It was a calm reply.

"Don't come begging to us, needle-thrower boy."

Takigawa formed her words.

The corners of her mouth rose as she looked straight at Kakei.

*...I see.*

It was true P.A. Oda had run a school to train the next generation.

In fact, it still existed.

Every nation had something like that. The best students would be gathered and raised to dedicate themselves to their nation.

But sometimes even more excellent students would arrive from outside.

The Ten Spears were an example, as was Sassa.

Everyone did it and it happened everywhere.

Just like people would start using "better" cookware and clothing in their everyday life, the personalities known as "nations" would select the very best of whatever they needed.

How many years had it been now?

The students who had been expected to take the positions directly below Hashiba had all been replaced and the original group had left.

Takigawa had already inherited her name at the time and she had simply thought "these things happen" when she heard about it.

So...

"Sorry, but telling me about a smaller nation's inferiority complex isn't going to change my mind," she said. "Besides, large nations are run by the people too. So that's where my focus is: the people. The protection of a large nation's presence and rules is no more than an advantage that nation has. You may look at a small nation as its people, but in that case, the lack of protection due to the small nation's weakness and rules is no more than a disadvantage that nations has. ...Don't just assume it justifies your inferiority complex."

She took a breath.

"Just get to the point: What do you want and what can you do, Kakei Juuzou?"

Kakei began sweating profusely in his heart.

*...So I screwed it up!*

No, he had to view it as a good thing that she was willing to hear him out.

*I sure get caught up in sentiment easily. I was giving off the wrong sort of presence, wasn't I? I hope I haven't caught Nezu's disease.*

At any rate, she had asked him to speak.

*...But I just did a bunch of speaking.*

No.

Before, he had been forcing their *hopes* onto her.

Now it was time for *reality*.

So he knew what he had to say here.

"Mochizuki, Unno, and I will join you here."

This was the procedure.

He had to list what they could do and what they would need to prepare.

"I'll primarily need bullets and fuses. 3000 bullets should be enough."

"Isn't that a lot?"

"Will you give me more?"

Takigawa smiled at that. He was not sure why she smiled.

If she would give him more, he just had to take as many as he could get. But Takigawa looked at him and made a comment.

"That look on your face tells me you can do more than that."

"Let's leave that as a surprise. ...I do have one thing I've stubbornly prepared but have held in reserve. I really don't plan on using it against Musashi, though."

"Is that so?" Takigawa then looked behind him. "Next."

Mochizuki stood there.

The automaton was apparently ready to respond. She immediately spoke over his shoulder.

It was her usual calm voice.

"Can you prepare artificial hairs equipped with explosion spells?"

"You don't like making things simple, do you?"

Takigawa smiled bitterly and placed a hand on her chin. Kakei thought this was a sincere reaction.

He felt they were being honest with each other now.

*...Huh?*

He mentally tilted his head.

He had thought he had angered Takigawa by creating an unnecessarily emotional atmosphere.

So why were they being honest with each other now?

*...W-well, I guess it doesn't matter.*

He did not understand, but he was not going to find fault with a favorable result.

But this response was somewhat bad. After all...

*...Does that mean she can't prepare Mochizuki's explosion spells?*

Mochizuki's explosion spells were unique. Since they were hidden in hairs, they could be taken anywhere. Since she could use her gravitational control on them, they could be thrown as projectiles or placed in flowing water.

Depending on how she prepared them, they could be used in other ways as well, but...

*...Either way, she needs a lot of them.*

She seemed to have used up a large quantity in the battle on the Ariake. She had never said anything about it, but her supply was clearly running low since she had not used one to light the fire when they were cooking outdoors.

But there was a way.

Providing information here would not leave anyone indebted to anyone, so Kakei did not hesitate to speak up.

"Takigawa-san. ...Pass this along to Houjou. They produce a lot of automatons. While I doubt they'll have what Mochizuki is talking about, they should be able to make some."

"Shaja. ...That's a good idea."

"Then," said Takigawa before Mochizuki replied.

"Unno-sama will need materials to repair her metal fan swords and her folding fans. Also," said Mochizuki. "Yes, would it be possible to allow her to choose some flashy clothes?"

"...And here I thought I was in charge."

"Oh? Did Kakei-sama the Beast wish to talk about Unno-sama's clothing?"

"No, most of my memories of her have her wearing a track suit..."

"Ah, so you are a fan of the gym clothes genre."

"...Is it just me or have you gotten harsher lately?"

Mochizuki ignored Kakei's complaint.

It was true she had recently been unable to cook or clean as much as she wanted. She had mostly been destroying things with her explosion spells, but in addition to that...

*...My position as one of the Ten Braves means I often have other people taking care of me.*

Whenever she found something she could do, someone else would do it instead, thinking they were being considerate.

As a maid automaton, people would leave the tasks to her, but they could not do that with one of the Ten Braves. Why were humans so influenced by titles?

Because she so often had to stop the task she had begun, her artificial brain tended to be cluttered with the garbage data left by the task shutdown procedure. That was meant to remain behind as experience, but she frequently had to free up that memory space and it was reducing her efficiency.

As a result, she had to reduce the burden by shortening the process. Long story short, it often meant sacrificing Kakei.

"Anyway, Unno-sama's spell should work at Odawara. If she can secure an elevated location on adjoining land, the geographic features should allow her to produce as much power as in Sanada land."

"I see." Takigawa crossed her arms and nodded. And she took a sip of her drink. "Ah. Maybe it's because of this heated conversation, but that really is refreshing."

She smiled a little.

Her shoulders shook as she took a slow breath.

"Now it's my turn to speak."

Her smiling eyes faced straight forward again. She re-crossed her legs and

opened her mouth.

"Sorry," she said. "But your selling points aren't really doing it for me."

"Listen," said Takigawa. "You say that, if Sanada is protected, Sanada can strike back at Matsudaira during the Osaka Campaign. ...That is admittedly important. But you know what?"

There was something she had to say here. It was a matter of reality, not sentiment.

"Listen," she said again. "By the time of the Osaka Campaign, Hashiba is only a small force. Matsudaira rules the Far East by then. What good is striking back at that point?"

Takei and Mochizuki remained expressionless, but that was to be expected with ninjas.

But that utter lack of reaction eloquently told her what was going on in their heads.

*...The truly skilled ones will intentionally let the mask slip at times like this.*

But these were combat ninjas, so she could not expect that from them. That was the entire reason she had requested some combat forces from Sanada.

But they would be disappointed in themselves for how things were going.

Besides, she understood what this Sanada group was trying to say.

"You said Sanada is a small nation, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Shaja." Takigawa nodded. And, "Takei Juuzou. ...Then you went on to say that Sanada is a presence capable of dealing a painful blow to Matsudaira during the Osaka Campaign."

"I wasn't quite that wordy about it, but...yes, I did."

"Then." Takigawa took a breath. "This is not going to be easy for Sanada, is it?"

Kakei's cheeks moved like he wanted to say something, but then they stopped.

*...That's right.*

Takigawa knew the fate of small nations that were caught up in the Testament descriptions and history recreation.

After all, she was a P.A. Oda retainer.

She knew very well that small nations could be dealt with and easily trampled on by the whims of a large nation. She had done it herself at times.

Sanada was the same.

"With the 1st Siege of Ueda complete, Sanada has two major events left: the 2nd Siege of Ueda that occurs during Sekigahara, and the Osaka Campaign."

And...

"In the 2nd Siege of Ueda, Sanada Masayuki and Nobushige fight to stop a Matsudaira force headed for Sekigahara."

"You've sure studied up on this."

"I was managing Kantou up until recently, if you recall."

Takigawa smiled a little and realized she was being self-deprecating.

It was pathetic for two losers to fight over who had the superior position. But...

*...This is necessary.*

They were anti-Matsudaira and they would remain as such until they stepped down from the stage of history.

She could not allow them to use their power incorrectly.

She was something of an upperclassman to them and had the support of a large nation. She could not accurately measure how open-minded she was, but she thought she was viewing all the major pieces that were moving history.

So she said it.

"Sanada will be under attack by the nations trying to join Matsudaira. And not

just in the physical form of war. It will include political and economic attacks."

That was why Sanada Chancellor Nobuyuki, the older brother, had fled to Musashi the other day. His request for asylum had been put off until later, but that action still made it harder for other nations to make a move against Sanada's Chancellor faction.

The problem was the Vice Chancellor faction that included the Ten Braves. That was Sanada's main force and it included Masayuki, the father, and Nobushige, the younger brother.

*...They will be under attack by the other nations.*

Sanada would of course be prepared for that. And they likely intended to survive the 2nd Siege of Ueda like that, but...

"Most likely, the main force will be moved to Osaka before the 2nd Siege of Ueda. Then the remaining normal students will carry out the battle."

And the main force would fulfill the history recreation during the Osaka Campaign.

She did understand why they would do that.

A note in the Testament said that, after the Osaka Campaign, the Sanada clan would experience some twists and turns involving succession, but they would eventually receive 100,000 *koku* of land in Matsushiro and gain stability.

A small nation tossed about by the age of warring states would finally have a definite destination.

It was known that Nobuyuki, the oldest son who had inherited Sanada, would live to the ripe old age of 93 and Takigawa had checked on all of this while she was managing Kantou.

She knew what would be the deciding factor in all this:

"The Osaka Campaign, hm?"

They intended to make their presence known in the Far East and to perform the history recreation accurately so that the Testament descriptions after that would also be followed accurately.

They were showing the willpower of a small nation.

And they would make sure they had a future.

That was why these two were here to negotiate.

They wanted their fellow Sanada residents to be protected to ensure they all had a future.

They wanted to protect the fighting force that would be worn down before the Osaka Campaign thanks to the attacks from other nations and the 2nd Siege of Ueda.

And it was of course about more than just their fighting force.

It would also be about the people who lived on Sanada land and about that land itself.

If they were to have a future, they needed to protect more than just a fighting force.

*...In that case...*

This was not something Takigawa could decide on her own.

This was an issue requiring a decision from Hashiba herself or from an official with the authority to manage the regions involved.

But she was no longer in charge of Kantou and she had not contacted Hashiba about any of this. The battle she was about to fight would act as the Siege of Kanie Castle in order to eliminate one of the losses during Komaki Nagakute, but she had not actually gotten the Testament Union's approval.

She had been relying on the assumption that Hashiba would pick up on her intentions here. But...

"———"

The two from Sanada looked at her with strength in their eyes.

They had to know how little political power Takigawa Ichimasu had at the moment, but they were still relying on her decision.

Was Sanada really that important to them?

*...Honestly.*

Takigawa had to wonder what the difference between them and her was. She thought about it in a positive light.

This had been a hopeless endeavor from the start.

However...

"I understand what you're trying to say."

"But?"

"You really won't be of any use to Hashiba at the Osaka Campaign."

That was the only possible conclusion there.

"If you are to be of some use to Hashiba, it would have to be at the 2nd Siege of Ueda that occurs during Sekigahara. ...That battle holds some Matsudaira forces in place, delays orders to march to the capital, and prevents them from participating in Sekigahara. So as a member of P.A. Oda, my advice is to focus on the 2nd Siege of Ueda instead," said Takigawa. "Besides, today...no, I guess it would be yesterday by now. Regardless, the 1st Siege of Ueda was just fought at Sanada. That means the 2nd one is up next, right?"

Takigawa stated her conclusion.

"Sanada. ...I cannot grant you what you want here."

# **Chapter 13: Pre-Battle Decision Maker**

# 第十三章

## 『戦場前の決断者』



答えの届く行く先は  
正解の厳しさが  
満足の喜びか  
配点（戦場）

*Will the answer arrive at*

*The harshness of correctness*

*Or the joy of satisfaction?*

### **Point Allocation (Battlefield)**

Kakei heard Takigawa say she could not support or protect Sanada.

*Yeah, I had a feeling,* he thought.

*...Damn.*

He had managed to convince himself it might work, but it might not be possible after all.

Participating in a battle meant gaining the right to speak within that battle. So during the strategizing phase, it was possible to use your combat force to negotiate with another nation.

So he had thought he might be able to work out a deal with this large battle approaching. However...

"\_\_\_\_"

It might not be possible after all.

*...Masayuki-san or the young master might be able to pull through in this tricky situation.*

But what about the normal students and the villagers?

*Damn,* he thought. *I need to keep trying.*

"Umm."

He opened a sign frame.

This was no time to worry about how he looked.

The other person had revealed her hand and was listening to him.

It was just that her current and future positions did not fit with their future.

Was there no way of changing that?

...*Damn*.

They had been hiding in the forest, so they had been unable to gather much intelligence. And he could not access much information since he could only connect to the general Shinto network instead of the exclusive Sanada network.

The 1st Siege of Ueda had taken place in Sanada the day before, but...

...*We don't really know how that played out*.

He also wanted to re-investigate the Siege of Odawara to get a new look at it.

"Takigawa-san."

"Yes?"

"We don't have authorization to open a divine transmission from this Houjou ship to the outside. Could I borrow your authorization? ...I want to take a look at the situation in Sanada."

"I see," said Takigawa while giving a nod of approval.

Her *insha kotob* was a Mlasi format, but...

"Oh, I can set up an interface."

Given that comment from the automaton behind him, it would probably be fine.

Kakei immediately faced his sign frame. His hands moved quickly across it and he used several divine transmission routes.

"Are you greeting Sanada?"

But just as she asked that...

"...?"

Kakei stopped moving.

He frowned and the hands racing atop the sign frame had come to a stop.

"What's wrong?"

"Takigawa-san. ...Was your authorization shut down?"

"No, mine is still up."

Her *insha kotob* was showing her data from P.A. Oda. She could access the popular P.A. Oda site called Janissary and the connection was fast. But...

"Sanada's divine transmissions have closed."

"Most likely, you would need to use a new password," explained Mochizuki. "In other words...with the 1st Siege of Ueda complete, Sanada has shifted to its state during Sekigahara and beyond."

Takigawa knew what that meant.

"Sanada has moved in the direction you feared it would."

Sanada was on the way to its ultimate destination.

Takigawa understood that as she took a breath.

*...This is our reality.*

Takei's group could do nothing to stop Sanada from moving in the direction they feared it would.

It was now unavoidable that Sanada would be exposed to attacks and interference from other nations.

Personally, she wished she could have protected them.

She felt like she could have accomplished that to an extent if she sent a divine transmission to Hashiba. After all, Hashiba had been the one to request the 1st Siege of Ueda.

But if she did that, Hashiba would probably grow overly considerate.

It might create an excess burden for her.

And the situation was dangerous enough as it was.

Takigawa was cooperating with Houjou and Mouri to eliminate one of the losses during Komaki Nagakute, but she would be acting separately from Houjou and Mouri during the actual battle. While up on the deck earlier, she had confirmed that P.A. Oda could not cooperate with those other two nations,

and...

*...They're using us as bait to catch an even greater prize.*

That was obvious enough from how Houjou and Mouri were acting.

And Takigawa could make a good guess what prize they were trying to catch.

It would be a major loss for Hashiba. It would also be a harsh battle for Matsudaira, but they would win big if they succeeded.

Takigawa felt certain that *that* was going to occur.

She had no way of stopping it.

*But*, she thought.

"If only I had my own fighting force."

If only she had power.

"Then maybe I could fight some more and reduce this coming loss at least by a little."

"What are you-...?"

"A group will be coming to save me. I want a loss that leaves no regrets and reduces the burden on everyone else, but they will still come here and create an even greater loss."

"Can you trust in your comrades?" asked the automaton.

"Shaja. We know each other well enough for that."

So...

"I don't want to be a burden on them."

And just as she said that...

"Wait."

Kakei raised his hand.

She looked up to find he was not looking at her.

His eyes were on his sign frame and his mouth was open.

She heard a trembling voice.

"There is one thing I would like to check on."

Namely...

"The 1st Siege of Ueda. ...I would like to reconfirm who requested that battle and what Sanada was supposed to gain from it."

"Huh? We went over this. It was on Hashiba's request and Sanada Nobushige's faction gets a warm welcome out of it."

"That's right," said Kakei. "But as far as I can tell, 'the people of Sanada' aren't included in that. And 'a warm welcome' doesn't specify anything and doesn't guarantee anything. Of course, Hashiba is..."

"...not the kind of person to go back on a promise."

Kakei silently nodded.

"Then I'll let go of one thing."

That being...

"That 'warm welcome' is probably about the Osaka Campaign. So I won't insist you allow the young master's group to participate in the Osaka Campaign."

...*Not bad.*

Takigawa was silently impressed.

What Kakei had done was simple.

He had split the conditions of his negotiation in two and backed off from one of them.

Kakei probably had not gathered his thoughts beforehand. He was also inexperienced as a negotiator. That was why he only now said something for the first time.

"Please protect the *nation* of Sanada."

This demand was likely born from Hashiba's request and the warm welcome of Nobushige's faction. Before, he had been negotiating for the protection of

Sanada as an extension of the Nobushige faction's warm welcome by Hashiba.

But he had just backed off from one of those.

He would let Hashiba handle the warm welcome of the Nobushige faction.

That had already been promised them, so backing off was not a problem.

In fact, it made the negotiation much simpler.

But it had changed what they were negotiating about.

After all, she had been negotiating *while accepting Kakei's words at face value*.

So...

*...Since I was accepting both demands at once, I have to give some ground now that he's backed off from one of them!*

This was an official negotiation.

She had grown careless partially because of Kakei's limited negotiation experience.

She had also concluded she would end up rejecting any demands because she had no authority to grant them.

So she had discussed the "protection" Kakei demanded as if it applied to both the Nobushige faction and the nation of Sanada.

Kakei had now backed off from one of those.

He had compromised.

"...?"

The look on his face suggested he had not planned this.

He had narrowed down his argument without really knowing what he was doing.

There of course had to be a reason why he did that.

*...Was it that divine transmission!?*

That had told him Sanada had shifted to their state during Sekigahara and

beyond. Seeing that had shown him the resolve of Sanada's leaders.

That had erased the arrogant idea that he had to protect everything.

He was left with only the desire to protect the people who would not benefit from the warm welcome.

That had led to this unintentional negotiation trick, but the rules were the rules.

He had indeed removed one of his two demands.

That was a compromise, so...

"———"

Takigawa was unsure how to respond.

*...Huh?*

Kakei realized the atmosphere had grown quite heavy.

That was thanks to Takigawa.

She had fallen silent and was staring at him with her arms crossed.

*...Crap... Did I do something wrong?*

He had only been trying to make a clear division between the two aspects of this issue.

He had realized something when the Sanada divine transmission had been cut off.

*...I can't hope to match Masayuki-san or the young master.*

They had enough resolve to get the normal citizens caught in the middle.

Kakei could not take things that far.

In a way, that probably meant he had not fully become a resident of the Sanada land.

He could not ask someone else to be a sacrifice.

He did not know if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but...

"Can't I at least ask for the protection of the people who can't fight?"

How about that?

The normal students were a different issue. As students, they would have to step forward if there was a war.

So even with the 2nd Siege of Ueda, there was no protecting them.

"Does this mean Masayuki-sama and the young master are trying to seize some sort of opportunity here? A Seize of Ueda, if you will?"

"Who thought it was a good idea to let automatons do that...?"

But even that silly pun gave him a quick break.

If possible, he wanted to do away with the 2nd Siege of Ueda altogether.

*...But I guess that wouldn't be possible...*

But just as he thought that...

"Kakei Juuzou."

Takigawa suddenly called out to him.

Her eyebrows lay flat and she seemed to be glaring at him.

"I understand that you have abandoned Sanada's leaders and are trying to protect its people. And there is one method of accomplishing that."

"There is!?"

His voice echoed through the dining hall.

It was abandoned at this hour, so even with a floor of hardened dirt blocks, the sound reverberated strongly.

But Kakei did not care. He scooted his butt a bit to lean forward while sitting cross-legged.

"...What is it?" he asked.

It no longer mattered what he looked like or what people thought of him. With how he was feeling now, there was no point in even considering the inviolable rule of keeping a straight face while negotiating.

He simply had to ask and snatch away the information he needed.

So he listened.

"You said you are skilled warriors, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then there is only one problem left for you." Takigawa pointed at him. "You all are in charge of the 2nd Siege of Ueda."

Takei did not understand what he had just been told.

*...Huh?*

He knew what the 2nd Siege of Ueda was. Anyone from Sanada would.

It was a battle between Matsudaira and Sanada.

During Sekigahara, Matsudaira's forces attempted to take control of the Nakasendou, an important travel route, but they were delayed by the Sanada father and son holed up in Ueda Castle. Sanada's opponent had been Hidetada, the son of Matsudaira Motonobu who would go on to be the second shogun. Sanada's forces had been led by Sanada Masayuki and his second son Nobushige.

Sanada knew the land better and was more skilled in negotiation and small-scale battles, so they would have the advantage and delay Hidetada's army until the Battle of Sekigahara was complete.

According to the Testament, the Matsudaira forces numbered 38,000.

In contrast the Sanada forces left 2000 in Ueda Castle and sent 1500 outside to fight.

They had defeated a force more than two dozen times their size. However...

*...That can be easily overturned with interpretations.*

But Takigawa was saying to do that.

Who was she saying should do that?

"...Us?"

"Shaja, of course. ...If you were serious about your skill, then you should be able to lead a small force of 3500, right?"

Kakei gasped.

*...Hold on.*

He had started this from a fairly unreasonable position, but it had just taken a very unexpected turn. It was true he had held a biased view that only the leaders of the nations could lead the history recreation. He could not deny that he had convinced himself that ninjas like them could act as negotiators, but could not move an entire nation.

*But*, he thought.

Takigawa was suggesting that they stand on the main stage of history.

This would mean they were not "Unneeded".

She was telling them to act as individuals who remained in this world. Did that viewpoint come from her position in a large nation?

It did not matter. There was something else he wanted to know now.

"If we did do that, what would happen?"

"I would have an easier time holing up in my castle. ...That would create two battlefields: yours and mine. And that would split Musashi's forces."

In other words, they could divide the enemy forces. He thought about what that meant.

"...So our main role would be to keep the enemy busy?"

"That's right."

Kakei saw Takigawa nod, but then...

"Could you wait for a moment please?"

He heard Mochizuki's voice behind him.

*...Mochizuki?*

His body tensed on reflex.

Mochizuki was an automaton. She was always looking for the best possible

solution. So if she was interrupting...

*...Is there something bad about this?*

"I would like to confirm one thing about what you said earlier, Takigawa-sama."

Specifically...

"You said that there is a problem, did you not?"

"Shaja. There's no point in hiding it, so I was just about to bring it up."

There was a problem.

Takigawa did indeed go on to explain what she had alluded to.

"Houjou will be giving me an aerial ship to act as Kanie Castle. Holing up in an aerial ship means to stay inside it and fight from there, so it's no different from how a warship is normally used. But I have already fought and lost to the Musashi in the Shirasagi Castle."

"And we're more of a ground force, so we're not suited for fighting on ships."

*...So that's it.*

Takei gave a sigh of understanding deep in his gut.

"Our battlefields don't fit together well and you don't think you can beat the Musashi."

Mochizuki understood the problem Takigawa carried.

*...It is true battling the Musashi would be difficult even if she is given a new warship here.*

A ship or two was not enough for an opponent like that.

Now that the Musashi had Kanesada as a main cannon and was gathering plenty of secondary cannons, how many nations even had an aerial force capable of standing up to them?

But there was a reason Takigawa was stating this.

"Takigawa-sama, you wish to defeat Musashi, don't you?"

"———"

Takigawa gave her a silent look.

Then her mouth twisted in what was probably supposed to be a smile.

"Ha ha."

She vocalized a laugh, but it was no more than a series of sounds. She also placed a hand on her forehead.

"Of course I do. I went to so much effort and I still got utterly crushed in the end. ...Even though the Shirasagi Castle was one of the most cutting-edge warships in P.A. Oda."

"Then are you saying you wish to defeat Musashi without relying on the Kanie Castle you will soon be given?"

But there was indeed a problem here. Kakei spoke while looking back at her with a fuse in his mouth.

"Mochizuki, what do you think'll happen if we try to fight on or inside a ship?"

"A large flat surface like the Ariake would be fine, but we would generally be in an unfamiliar situation. Not to mention that Sanada has few aerial ships so we have insufficient training in that regard," explained Mochizuki. "So if we are to demonstrate the value Takigawa-sama wants from us, we must do so as a ground force."

"If she stops the aerial ship on the ground, won't it just make for a nice target?"

"Not necessarily. There are some locations that allow for a unilateral attack on the enemy. For example..."

Mochizuki prepared to give an example, but Takigawa took the words out of her mouth. And her tone made it obvious this was intentional.

"In the middle of a city. If we attack from within a bunch of normal citizens, we can claim the enemy is attacking civilians if they try to retaliate. That's pretty cowardly, though."

"Well, we can't be cowardly, can we?" said Kakei.

But they were on the right track.

They needed a location where Musashi could not attack them.

But also where no normal citizens would be caught in the middle.

*...Does such a location exist?*

"...Mochizuki."

Kakei raised his right hand in front of her.

"Let me see the map of Houjou."

"Do you have an idea, Kakei-sama?"

"Nope," he said with his back turned. "But Houjou is like Sanada's backyard. They're our neighbor, so we've been keeping an eye on them for forever. We know Houjou land better than Takigawa-san over there."

So...

"Let me see the map. ...And, Takigawa-san?"

"What is it, Kakei Juuzou?"

"Well," he replied. "We will protect you."

Kakei felt a heat within him.

*...This isn't like me.*

He wanted to say he wasn't this kind of person. But...

*...Am I?*

"Sorry, but I'm gonna light this. I can just focus better with some smoke, so feel free to take off my head if I reach into my pocket."

Once he said that, several sign frames appeared in front of him.

They were maps of Houjou. Mochizuki had prepared them and they provided an overhead view of Odawara.

*...We have to find a location in here that prevents the Musashi from attacking.*

Looking at the maps was enough for him to picture the terrain in the back of

his mind. He had helped create these maps after all. And that told him something.

*...There isn't one.*

The fuse smoke allowed him to calmly reach that conclusion.

Odawara was a mountainous peninsula, so it would be possible to hide an aerial ship there or construct some kind of natural cover to hide behind. But once they were found, they would be hit by a storm of cannon fire.

And it was devastating that they could not avoid the Musashi's main cannon by hiding.

He had seen the power of Kanesada up close.

That thing would be able to fire through a small mountain, so a natural fortress would only serve to keep them from escaping in time. So...

"———"

Was a city the only option?

No, that was not an option either.

Takigawa and Sanada's reputation would plummet if they did that. In the worst case, Hashiba would use that as an excuse to cancel any promises they had made.

*...In that case...*

The safest location would be within the main battlefield. Near Odawara Castle would be especially good.

They knew the area around Odawara Castle would be intentionally flooded. By establishing the flooding in advance, the time spent fighting could be shortened.

So that was where they had to place the aerial warship that would be the Kanie Castle.

The Musashi could not fire its main cannon on the same battlefield to which their forces were deployed.

However...

"Takigawa-san."

"What is it?"

"...Can you guarantee that Houjou will assist us?"

"I honestly doubt they will. They seem to be working with Mouri...but as I said before, they only see us as bait. At the very least, they would not want us on the battlefield."

"I see," said Mochizuki behind him.

*...We're in such a difficult position here.*

They could not borrow a spot on the battlefield.

Then what were they to do?

When viewed through the smoke, the maps of Houjou felt so far away.

But even when viewed from a distance, he could not find a good spot.

*...C'mon now. Pull yourself together.*

If he could not find a good spot, they would lose everything.

He had to find it. If he did that, they would gain everything.

They would be able to say they were no longer Unneeded.

In Sanada, everyone had to be preparing for Sekigahara and beyond.

They were all facing that from within history. They were moving toward the history they would create and a future in which they survived.

*We have to help them from here.*

The three of them here had to complete the 2nd Siege of Ueda that everyone in Sanada was cautious of.

If they could do that, it would greatly reduce the burden on everyone else.  
So...

"I will find it."

And...

"Takigawa-san. ...We will protect you and make sure you return to P.A. Oda."

After all...

"You need to return to Hashiba and tell her how well this trio from Sanada did."

And to do that, he needed...

"A location for the castle."

Just as he said that, Kakei realized he was in the process of sticking his hand in his pocket.

*...Whoops.*

He quickly pulled his hand away from his hip. Then he realized the pocket was tightly closed.

"I have been using my gravitational control to ensure you did not put your hand your pocket," said Mochizuki.

"Oh, so my carelessness didn't nearly get me killed."

He smiled bitterly and his careless right hand knocked over the glass sitting on his tray.

The water spilled out, circled around the bottom of the parfait container, and spread out across the tray.

*Now I've done it*, he thought. But then...

"...Ah."

He realized something.

Here was a location where the Musashi could not attack them and no normal citizens would be caught in the middle.

He had just seen it right in front of him.

Takigawa saw movement.

Kakei suddenly stood up and moved to the dining hall's window.

He was fast. It only took an instant. But by the time she turned to follow his movement, he was already showing her something: a sign frame.

It displayed the scenery below the ship, which meant Houjou land at the moment.

It initially showed only the colors of night, but that was quickly corrected for. An Amaterasu optical spell was applied to amplify the light sensitivity, so the scene on the sign frame looked like midday.

She first saw a forest there.

Near Odawara, a forest spread out from the mountainous peninsula. But...

"The map wouldn't show you this. This was made far too recently for that."

What was "this"?

There was a red light near Kakei's mouth. It was the light of his fuse.

That scarlet light illuminated a smile on his face.

"Takigawa-san, I've found it. This is where we'll hole up in our castle."

He zoomed in on the sign frame.

He zoomed in on the spot where the forest should end and the land leading to Odawara Castle should begin. On the sign frame Mochizuki had provided earlier, there had been a hill and a field there.

But it was different now.

"...A lake?"

"Not just any lake. ...An artificial lake."

It was...

"The water source for the flooding of Odawara Castle. That's what it was made for. We just have to place the Kanie Castle there."

Takigawa looked up when she heard Kakei's words.

*...Can we do that?*

This was a method of fighting Musashi.

It was a means of sealing off their main cannon and forcing them into a head-

on battle.

"You want us to put the Kanie Castle in the artificial lake?"

"I'm glad you understand," said Kakei. "It would take a lot of firepower to break that artificial lake's embankment. Like a blast from the Musashi's main cannon. And once that embankment breaks, Odawara Castle will be flooded in no time."

But...

"The battlefield has been placed away from any towns and people have been ordered out of the area. ...So even if that happens, the Houjou people will not be harmed. But Musashi can't afford to flood Odawara Castle. Houjou is pro--Matsudaira and seems to be plotting something, so that lake will be off limits to Musashi. Even if they do attack there, it can't be with their main cannon."

"So if we're in that lake, we can do whatever we want to Musashi?"

"They might fire their normal cannons and they might send in a ground unit."

"We can handle that on our own. ...And you'll be helping too, won't you?"

"Ha ha," laughed Kakei. "You said Kanie Castle was built on the sea, didn't you? This isn't the sea, but it's sort of the same thing, right? You all hole up there and we'll protect you from the outside. ...How about that?"

He held up the sign frame displaying the artificial lake and tossed it to her.

She caught it and spun it around with her finger. And...

"I'll have to negotiate with Houjou to have the Kanie Castle located there."

But this meant a lot.

"Now we have a way of striking back against Musashi. ...Isn't that right, Sanada? That will be enough to give you some sway with Hashiba. Let's keep this quiet. Of course, Houjou is sure to know all about it since we're discussing it here."

Takigawa stood up, took a breath, and realized the corners of her mouth were rising.

There was a tone of delight in the words that escaped her mouth.

"I'm finally prepared for this losing battle."

Ha ha.

"You can say you're ready a thousand times, but it's not so easy to actually feel it like this."

A long day ended for a few different forces.

The transport ship that would take the Musashi forces back to the Musashi arrived in Sanada early in the morning.

The Hashiba forces and Hexagone Française continued their preparations through the night and the night shift swapped out with the morning shift.

Houjou and Mouri brought their ships closer and exchanged private divine transmissions as they gathered in Houjou land.

The following day would be a day of preparation.

Each of those battle formations took a short rest to prepare for the battle the day after that.

# Chapter 14: Commotion Maker in a Closed Room

# 第十四章

## 『密室の騒がせ人』



寝ていても友人  
起きてても友人  
変わる方法は何か  
配点 (生活)

*A friend while asleep*

*A friend while awake*

*What makes that change?*

### **Point Allocation (Lifestyle)**

The ceiling had changed from bluish-black to purple.

Night was turning to dawn, so the color of the sky was changing.

The purple turned to light scarlet, white grew yellow, and it finally became blue.

Those color changes happened most quickly in the east.

And the wind was blowing.

The faintly sunlit air swept through the chilly sky.

It was a morning wind traveling from east to west.

It made its presence known by creating white lines of cloud in the morning sky.

Someone was watching the movement of that wind.

They watched from down on the floor.

The sky was visible through a white frame that had lost its paper sliding window.

"Na-chan, are you awake?"

"What a pain..."

"That's not really an answer to my question."

"You need to get up already, Toshi. It's morning."

Narimasa and Toshiie were conversing while lying on the floor.

They were in a karaoke room. A billiards table in the center of the room had been sliced in two and violently beaten and the balls were embedded in the walls.

The remains of what had once been musical instruments were strewn across the stage.

"Before he left, Shibata said 'they won't notice it's broken if I do this' and tied the broken guitar together with its own strings, but it's clearly broken and it looks like a vessel used for some kind of strange ritual."

"Yeah, it doesn't even have a neck anymore. And the brass instruments are completely deformed and lying in a pile, but what is Mori doing? His head is stuck in that horn's opening, but is he sleeping?"

"I imagine he is."

The *lernen figur* on the stage was asking them to request a song.

When he saw the timer saying they had 2 hours left, Narimasa muttered a comment.

"I wonder how things are going in Kantou."

"That's a good question," said Toshiie from the floor. "I bet the sources of our names felt like this back in the Age of the Gods. What do you think, Na-chan?"

"How should I know?"

"Yeah, I suppose you're right," said Toshiie before something occurred to him.

...*Hm?*

"Na-chan."

"What?"

"If you can dismiss questions about the past with a simple 'how should I know?', can't you do the same for current things?"

*Is he going to reject the idea?* wondered Toshiie.

He assumed Narimasa would just tell him to shut up. However...

"That would certainly make things easier."

Toshiie was unsure how to respond at first.

It took him 5 whole seconds to think about what Narimasa's reply meant.

"That's incredible, Na-chan! I think this is the first time I've seen any sign of growth from you!"

"It was so surprising you had to pause first?"

"Don't worry about it, don't worry about it! Should I make some *sekihan*!? Or how about some black curry since you're from the Black Horo Unit!? Even if I can't eat curry myself!"

"Shut up. There's still some sake left."

Toshiie smiled bitterly at Narimasa's "shut up".

"Anyway, how has your mindset changed?"

"Not knowing things is definitely easier."

Narimasa crossed his arms below his head and looked out the window, but...

"Na-chan, I can't see out the window with the sofa in the way. And Michi is sleeping on the sofa with a sake bottle in her arms."

"So that's what that lump in the blanket is." Narimasa sighed. "It's about what you were saying before."

"That you just achieved growth for the first time ever?"

"Before that. About my...my..."

"My-da? Yes, that is my name."

Narimasa glared at Toshiie.

*...Come to think of it, how does Na-chan keep those sunglasses from falling off while lying down?*

But he was looking up at the ceiling right now.

"My name's origin. The people from the Age of the Gods. They would've had a lot less freedom and it couldn't have been easy, but I think they would have worked to eliminate the kinds of negative thoughts we're having now."

"Why?"

"Because they didn't have divine transmissions."

Toshiie could not respond for three full seconds.

And then he nodded.

"So you've finally figured out how to use your brain, Na-chan. You're growing so fast it's kind of scaring me."

Narimasa glared at him again.

But he did understand what Narimasa meant.

"It's hard to believe, but they really only had smoke signals and whistles to communicate over a distance. Other than that, they would have to write a letter to be delivered by foot or horse. ...Information on the outside world was generally acquired from traveling merchants, diplomats, travelers, and ninja spies. Immediate notice of events was unthinkable, the time lag was bad, and information was often incomplete."

As a Treasurer who managed trade, he could not imagine controlling a nation without the ability to instantly check on information.

"It's amazing the world didn't just collapse like that. If someone attacked another nation over baseless suspicions and it triggered a chain reaction, the entire world would decline."

"We see similar things happening in the history recreation, don't we?"

"That's true."

*That's an elementary question, but Na-chan probably never studied any of this,* he thought.

So he explained.

"The Far East has always had divine transmissions for the history recreation. Even back when it was called the Divine States, the Shinto network existed, so they were allowed to have 'oracles'. You know, the idea of 'hearing a disembodied voice'. The Divine States was allowed divine transmissions very early on as a recreation of that. ...And they tried to do the same thing in the Harmonic Divine States. The Harmonic Divine States was a copy of the Divine States, so the basic structure of the Shinto network was also copied there."

But...

"The Harmonic Divine States was of course a collection of many nations. To

secure their own interests and to protect their own data, they tended to restrict their networks to their own nation and maybe their allies."

"Well, that's not very helpful. What were they thinking?"

"If you have multiple people living in a large room, they're going to divide it up, aren't they?"

"My room is pretty small."

"What about your shelf for music gold disks?"

Narimasa paused for a second before answering.

"Yeah, I guess I do divide those up. ...Or I at least don't randomly mix them together."

"Really...? Oh, I'm not surprised. I just didn't really expect it," said Toshiie. "Anyway, once Tsihc came about, they set up a network that crossed national borders. And that gave the church a lot of power, so the religious differences became an issue in the history recreation, causing something of a mess. But even then, it was hard to increase the population and there were a lot of losses due to clashes with dragons and other nonhumans, conflicts of interests, and the history recreation."

"Humanity needs to get its act together."

"That's why we decided to do so."

"Why do I get the feeling we haven't managed it yet?"

"Because we kind of haven't."

That was when Toshiie realized what Narimasa had wanted to say.

"The people from the Age of the Gods would have been done for if they were too negative, wouldn't they?"

"Yeah. They couldn't use divine transmissions to immediately work out misunderstandings, look ahead, or see if someone was okay."

This was Narimasa's main point.

"Would those people have agreed that not knowing was easier?"

"It's hard to say," Toshiie heard Narimasa say. "Since they never had divine transmissions in the first place, they wouldn't know how difficult they had it. They would think of it was normal and just live like that."

"Then I wonder what it was like for us."

"Not us. ...The original bearers of our names."

"Testament," agreed Toshiie. "They probably trusted each other easily but also resented each other easily. As in, a misunderstanding would readily lead to a grudge, but they would also return to being friends once the misunderstanding was cleared up. That was normal for them and the other person was the same, so there would be no point in finding fault there."

"I probably would have fit in pretty well there."

"Na-chan, you can actually hold a pretty strong grudge."

Just as Toshiie said that...

"L-let me join that conversation!"

The tentacle rose up on the stage.

The tentacle standing straight up looked a lot like something else.

"Hey, Toshi. There's a dick over there."

"It looks that way to me too, but those generally don't have a horn over the tip."

"Eh? Wh-what are you two talking about!? And Master Maeda, Master Sassa! Why is it so dark!?"

The tentacle with a horn on the end began frantically shaking his head back and forth.

And there was only one way to view that.

"Hey, Toshi. There's a horny dick swinging around over there."

"It looks that way to me too, but that's not the usual kind of hidden talent shown off after a major conference."

"Eh? Wh-what are you two talking about!? But more importantly, I'm having trouble seeing because it's so dark. Is it night time!? Or is there something wrong with my vision!? Wait, maybe I've been so blinded by love I've lost sight of everything else..."

"Hey, Toshi. There's a horny dick hanging its head over there."

"It looks that way to me too, but doesn't that contradict the horny part?"

The tentacle turned their way.

"Wh-what are you two talking about!? Please don't say anything so indecent!"

"Yeah, but, Mori, your head is covered, isn't it?"

"H-how rude! I have an adult shape!"

"Who gave him alcohol last night? He's clearly still drunk."

**Great Upperclassman:** "Huh? You got a problem with thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?"

"God, you're annoying..."

But the horn suddenly swayed.

"Ah...oh, no! I'm having trouble breathing... I-I might be a goner. If only I could have spent my final moments nestled against my beloved's breast..."

"Hey, Toshi. The dick is suffocating. Blow into that horn to give him some oxygen."

"Don't be ridiculous, Na-chan. What if I accidentally breathed in?"

"I thought you two respected me, so why do you keep calling me a dick!? That's so dirty!"

"Just to be clear, Mori, I never said it."

"And have you ever seen what you look like?" asked Narimasa.

"I have!" insisted the horn. "Every evening after my bath, I perform some skin care in front of the mirror! Because no one would want anything to do with me if I was a dirty tentacle! This region is cold, so if I don't apply cream to myself daily, I will crack, bleed, and end up like an RPG mid-boss. So just yesterday, I

was applying some cream and scented oil when I started to get in an indecent mood, but I restrained myself!"

"Mori, you are quite a character."

"Oh, you flatter me."

With that, the dick collapsed to the floor with the sound of slapping flesh.

He had probably succumbed to suffocation.

Narimasa commented on the scene.

"Hey, Toshi. The dick just fell over."

"Yeah, it was oddly intense."

Just as they said that, Fuwa rolled over in the sofa beyond Narimasa and then fell right off. And on top of Narimasa.

Another sound of slapping flesh and a dull sound were louder than the simple one of impact.

"Na-chan?"

Toshiie called out to him and turned around, but then he noticed something.

Fuwa's sake bottle had hit Narimasa clean on the head, knocking him out.

And Fuwa herself was positioned with her head by Narimasa's feet and vice-versa.

"Michi?"

She lay on top of him in only a shirt and underwear.

Fuwa woke up.

"Ah?"

She remembered a lot happening the night before. Those boys had a tendency to get all gloomy, so she had sung songs to take control of the situation.

She had drunk a lot.

She had eaten snacks.

She had eaten real food.

She had sung some more.

She remembered drunkenly punching Shibata, but she could not remember why. She decided that meant it was only the result that mattered.

When she looked up, she saw the broken billiards table.

*...Wow, we are the worst.*

She was not sure why, but that was her assessment.

"Well, it doesn't matter."

She felt something dried onto the side of her mouth. *Sake? It's not vomit, is it? I'm not like Takenaka. We might both be glasses girls, but that's where the similarities end.*

She wiped off her mouth.

"It is vomit..."

*Huhhh? Where did I vomit...?*

"Ah."

*No. There's a bowl of pudding on the sofa. That's what this is.*

"Oh, thank goodness... So I didn't spew in front of everyone."

"Michi, I hate to interrupt your little fact-finding mission there, but..."

"Oh, Maeda?"

She tried to look back, but then she noticed her footing was poor. Or her seat in this case.

*...What is this?*

She sat up and looked down to see a crotch wearing men's pants.

Karaoke places apparently used really weirdly shaped cushions.

Then she realized she was only wearing a shirt and underwear.

That brought back another memory. She had drunk a lot, sang a lot, and then

stripped off some clothing because it was hot.

But only her jacket.

Why had she stripped this far? She did not remember. The fragments of images left in her mind showed her in a karaoke competition with Oichi, drinking some more, and then a giant blank.

*...She must have stripped me.*

*Lady Oichi is surprisingly thorough, she thought.*

"Huh?"

Her thighs were cold and she realized they were bare.

"Wait."

She quickly reached for her hips and found strings there. She was wearing underwear.

*...That was a close one.*

But when she quickly turned around to try to move away from Toshiie...

"Eh?"

She reached down to balance herself and struck something with the heel of her palm.

She looked down and saw Sassa.

And that blow had woken him up.

"Ow..."

"Don't wake uuuup!!"

Fuwa slammed down the bottom of a sake bottle lying nearby.



Fuwa heard a dull sound transform into a light reverberation.

The sake bottle had shattered.

And then something pushed up at her butt from below.

"You moron! What was that for!?"

"I told you not to wake up!"

"Huh?"

Narimasa glared at her from beyond the butt sitting on him.

"Hey, Fuwa."

"What?"

She decided she might as well be stubborn about this, but Narimasa pointed at her butt with a bored look on his face.

"What is this?"

"Huh!? You can't tell?"

"It's a butt."

"Yes, it is. Then why did you ask!? Is there something wrong with you, Sassa?"

"Move it."

When she heard that, Fuwa felt like a firing hammer had been cocked deep in her mind.

*...Hey, hold on.*

"Y'know, Sassa?"

"What?"

"There's a girl's butt right here."

"Well, yeah. They don't tend to just disappear."

That pissed her off, but the hammer was still cocked.

So she spoke quietly.

"Aren't you going to get all flustered or blush or something?"

Sassa reacted to that with a glare.

"Why should I care when it's a girl who pisses herself?"

She swung a nearby empty bottle at him, but he twisted his head out of the way.

"Watch it, you moron!"

"After saying something so mean to a girl, you can't even accept one measly bottle to the face?"

"What I said was true!"

"Actually, Na-chan," said Toshiie. "I'd say you're the one at fault here."

"You're taking the girl's side!?"

"Stuuuupid! Stuuuupid!"

"You too, Matsu!?"

"Why wouldn't Ma-chan be on the girl's side? And calm down, Na-chan. It might seem strange for me to take the girl's side, but you're tough enough to take it, right?"

"...Whatever. Just move your butt, Fuwa."

Fuwa tilted her head.

"Move it yourself."

"Michi, that kind of sounds like a Sviet Rus name," said Toshiie.

"Movecherself?" repeated Matsu.

*Matsu sure is cute*, thought Fuwa, but the glaring boy spoke quietly.

"I can't just touch a girl's butt like it's nothing."

Fuwa looked back at Sassa's face.

"...Eh? What? You think of me as a girl?"

"Wow, I can tell this will be annoying."

"Ohhhhhh? Hmmmmm? I seeeeee."

But the thoughts in Fuwa's head were different.

*...Wow.*

*This isn't good.*

She felt an odd feeling rising from below her chest, near the front of her stomach.

It felt like having her heart tickled.

*Not good, not good. What's so weird about calling me a girl? I guess it was just so sudden or...oh, it's because I'm dressed like this. Yeah, that's probably it.*  
But...

*...Uh, oh.*

She could not move.

But not because she only had her underwear to cover her butt. While that was certainly a part of it, what he could see now was due to an accident.

But if she moved, he would see more and not due to an accident.

It was not that there was anything in particular she did not want him to see.

She just was not mentally prepared to let him see any more than this.

It may have been her state of undress that led him to treat her like a girl, but...

"I just never expected Sassa of all people to say that."

She hoped he could not tell she was merely feigning calm.

But what was she supposed to do?

How could she move from this position?

"Well, Sassa? Do you like having a girl's butt sitting on you?"

As soon as she asked that, he slapped both sides of her butt with his palms.

"Kyahhh!!"

It was the surprise more than any pain that mad her hips shoot up.

Then Sassa scooted back to press his back against the sofa behind him. He

was still glaring at her.

"Keep your ass off of me."

"Y-you idiot, why would you hit me hard enough to leave handprints!? Wow, it really is getting red!"

She really wanted to cry now.

Just then, something reflected the light as it rose up beyond the broken billiards table.

"Wh-who is defiling this space of holy love songs with a crude spanking!?"

*What is with that horn?*

*Actually, on closer inspection...*

"There's a dick wearing a brass instrument over there."

"Was that Lady Fuwa!? You mustn't call me that! A girl mustn't use dirty language like 'dick'!"

"Sassa, Maeda. The Oda clan's dick is denying his own right to exist."

"You really should stop saying that," said Narimasa.

"But, Master Sassa, you were calling me a dick just a bit ago! So why are you suddenly getting after Lady Fuwa for it!? Are you trying to show off to her how mature you are!?"

"He's showing off his maturity over the word dick?"

For the first time in her life, Fuwa saw a horn rise straight up.

*...What a ridiculous image...*

Meanwhile, she heard his voice.

"Excuse me, but why do the three of you insist on calling me a dick!? I am not a dick! I am a tentacle! Am I a tentacle? Yes, I am! Do you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand. I really do, so calm down a little, Mr. Dick."

"God, you're both so annoying."

"And wait," said Fuwa. "Does this mean you two were repeating dick over and

over with a girl sleeping on the sofa?"

"I never said it, Michi, and Na-chan only said it like five times."

"Th-that's too much already!" protested the horn. "That's as much as a grown man should say it in a whole month!"

"I didn't realize there was a standard amount, but I guess a dick would know best."

"Ha ha ha. Michi, Mori is just being modest. Isn't that right?"

"N-no one calls themselves modest!"

"But you've been taking pilgrimages to Tsihrhc churches ever since arriving here, haven't you?"

*...Sassa, that's just called going to mass...*

She decided to leave that unsaid. She also pulled a blanket up to cover her legs.

Then Mori nodded.

"The scripture recitations in a holy cathedral are so sublime. They make me feel so clean, unlike that 'cursed drum' I was forced to listen to for so long in the Dark Continent."

"Do any of the other worshipers say that a tentacle in a church seems like the final boss of a horror movie?"

"No, they do not! Why are you always so mean, Lady Fuwa!?"

The tentacle suddenly collapsed onto his side.

Fuwa frowned at the sound of slapping flesh.

"Suffocation?"

"There's no helping him," muttered Narimasa in response.

"That's a mean thing to say."

With a clear voice, someone got up on Maeda's right side.

"Matsu."

It was Matsu.

But she was not in her usual Mouse form.

She was human sized as she stretched up in a sitting position. She had a slender body instead of the Mouse form used to support Maeda as a ghost.

"Yes. It's me: Ma-chan."

Now that Matsu had returned to her original size, Toshiie remained lying down as he pulled her to him.

Narimasa turned their way.

"Hey, Toshi, are you sure about this?"

"We don't have any obvious battles coming up. And this form is more natural for Ma-chan anyway. She is admittedly cute when she's little..."

He placed his hand on Matsu's cheek as her black hair spilled down.

"But you're so pretty like this...Matsu."

"Which do you prefer?"

Narimasa got a "god, you're annoying" look on his face and escaped onto the sofa.

But this was a precious time for Toshiie.

"Right now, I prefer you as Matsu."

Matsu nodded at that.

"Good job, Toshiie."

She rubbed his head.

*Does that compliment mean she isn't taking me seriously?* he wondered, but this was comfortable enough for him to not care. But...

"Since you've become Matsu, can I assume something's happened?"

"Yes. Something major seems to have happened related to Hashiba."

"What do you mean 'related to'?" Matsu turned toward Narimasa with a

smile.

"Sassa? You're an iiiiiidiot. ...Anyway, Toshiie."

"C-curse this girl..."

Matsu turned toward Narimasa with a smile.

"Sassa? From what I've seen, you're popular with the girls because your negative thoughts make you the silent type. You seem to be raising flags all over the place, but since you're most worried about Takigawa, are you into older women? ...Anyway, Toshiie. Umm..."

Matsu turned toward Narimasa with a smile.

"And even with all your popularity, Toshiie and I got married first, so we were the winners. You're just a loser. ...Anyway, Toshiie. Ah, wait just a moment."

Matsu turned toward Fuwa with a straight face.

"Fu-chi, you should really consider a future with someone better."

"What!? Where did that come from!?"

"Ma-chan, even if it does build up over time, you shouldn't throw it all at them at once."

"But life is so much easier as a Mouse. I know it means I have to wait to talk like this, but...but everyone's so nice to me like that."

"Do you like having people spoil you?"

"Yeah, I love it."

"So do I. Na-chan refuses to cooperate, though."

They heard a voice saying "god, you're annoying", but they ignored it.

But Matsu's smile shrank as she got back on topic.

"The ley lines are on the move. ...It's like the ley line infrastructures of P.A. Oda, M.H.R.R., and cooperative K.P.A. Italia are moving toward Mouri."

She implicitly stated that she was not sure why this was happening, so Toshiie nodded.

"I guess Hashiba must be starting something. Something that had to be kept a

secret even from us."

"What do you mean?"

"Takenaka probably put together an emergency plan and they couldn't afford having it leak out. They want to settle this quickly, so I bet they've put together a plan that wouldn't work if the enemy knew about it."

Toshiie nodded and Matsu nodded atop his chest.

"Praise me, praise me."

"You're so wonderful, Matsu. Not many wives could notice ley line movements."

"Good, good."

With that Matsu looked behind her.

A horn lay collapsed there, but he was causing noise since he would sometimes stir as if rolling over in his sleep.

"Toshiie, Toshiie. There's a dick with a horn on its head there! It's an emergency!"

"That is certainly an emergency." Toshiie lightly patted her on the back. "But, Ma-chan, girls shouldn't say dick."

Fuwa glared at him, but he did not care.

"Honestly, there's no getting a good night's sleep around here recently."

A grumbling voice came from the morning sky.

Six gold wings stood on the front of a ship's deck. It was Yoshiaki.

The six black wings next to her already held a long collection of metal.

"There's no helping that, Kime-chan. ...So, Kiyo? What should we do? What do you want us to take a look at?"

That was addressed to Kiyomasa who stood halfway down the deck.

She wore a shirt and black tights and she had her back turned while holding up a *lernen figur* displaying an arrival and departure sign.

There was someone else beyond her.

"Katagiri-kun, what should we do?"

When she called out to him, Katagiri's shoulders shook inside his uniform. He had apparently been lost in thought.

He quickly turned around and looked up at Kiyomasa, but he just as hurriedly looked back down.

"Katagiri-kun?"

"I-I can see your navel!"

"Huh?"

Kiyomasa sounded confused, but she also pulled down the bottom of her shirt. And then...

"I was thinking Wakisaka-sama and Yoshiaki-sama could take a look at Paris when they took off for Houjou."

"Oh, Testament. We could use a map of the area around Paris. They've probably turned the inside into a maze, so a look at that would be useful too."

An image of shimmering light appeared on the deck in front of Katagiri.

It was a map of Paris made from sunlight.

Kiyomasa viewed Katagiri's map of Paris from above.

*...Hundred Crest Land Survey's precision really has improved.*

Hundred Crest Land Survey used light, wind, water, or sound to form images.

It was a spell used to give physical form to sensory data. If he could receive the input of his five senses, Hundred Crest Land Survey would activate. It was a lot like the difference between Internal and External Blessings.

If its precision had improved, then Katagiri's ability to visualize things must have improved.

That made her kind of happy, so Kiyomasa decided to inform the others.

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Katagiri-kun has gotten a lot better at visualizing things in his

mind."

**AnG:** "Oh, dear. He's learned how to do those things in his imagination, has he?"

**6:** "I'll make sure he doesn't look at me for a while."

**Kuro Take:** "So who was it with?"

**Kimee:** "Isn't Nagayasu monitoring this kind of thing?"

**Tsurugi:** "Eh!? Is that why his blood pressure is spiking at about 2 o'clock every night!?"

□□凸: "Wait! What happened to my right to privacy!?"

**Llaf:** "Calm down. Katagiri-dono is not that kind of person. This must be some kind of mistake. Yes, everyone makes mistakes when they are young and Katagiri-dono is young! Thus, it should surprise no one that he would make that kind of mista-..."

Fukushima paused for a moment.

**Llaf:** "Where did I make a mistake in my reasoning? ...Oh, excuse me. I am being called to the counter."

□□凸: "After all that, I'm less important than her breakfast!?"

*What were they serving this morning again?* wondered Kiyomasa as Katagiri raised a *lernen figur*. It displayed a 3D map of Paris that was synced with and extracted from Hundred Crest Land Survey. Plus...

"I would appreciate it if you could get a look at the whole city from this angle before they set up their final stealth barrier."

The line he had drawn was shallow.

Katagiri was demanding they fly directly above Paris's wall and photograph it from a very shallow angle as if striking it with a chisel. Wakisaka and Yoshiaki received those instructions on the bow.

"Katagiri, what's the significance of the *angle*?"

"That's a gap in the data stealth barrier that Paris has provisionally placed over itself." Katagiri held a hand over the Hundred Crest Land Survey Paris. "It's

a gap between the city wall and the dome-shaped stealth barrier that doubles as a defense barrier. There's only a vertical space of about 1.2 meters and the shape makes it a lot like peeking below a diagonal piece of armor. It looks like they're going to fill in that gap from behind today, so now is our only chance to peek inside. ...From what I can tell, they have three layers of defense barrier on the inside, but I can't seem to figure out why they're wasting resources like that."

"Oh, that's probably because of this."

Kiyomasa raised her left hand vertically.

And when Katagiri turned toward her...

"Think of my hand as the inner barrier, okay?"

"Okay."

"Let me see, let me see!"

Wakisaka called over from the bow, so Kiyomasa took a half step to the side.

Kiyomasa raised her vertical hand a bit before speaking.

"Let's say this is the defense barrier inside Paris."

"Okay."

"Then when we fire a shell at Paris, it would slip through that diagonal armor gap and reach Paris, right? Then what would happen to the shell?"

"It would hit the inner defense barrier."

That was correct.

Kiyomasa nodded and smiled to Katagiri. But...

"Now, your question was why three instead of one. ...Katagiri-kun?"

"Yes?"

"If you only had one defense barrier, how would you construct it?"

"Well..." Katagiri started thinking, so Kiyomasa's smile grew bitter.

"You don't have to think so hard about it."

Katagiri had started giving a fair amount of thought to tactics. He had a bad habit of getting ahead of himself and making unwarranted assumptions, but smart people tended to do that.

It was because he was smart that he could discard the unnecessary thoughts.

Katagiri soon looked up in realization.

“I would make it strong!”

“Testament. That is the fundamental idea. Until the medieval period, around the 14th century, that was primarily how they were made.”

“Is it different now?”

“Testament.” Kiyomasa nodded. “What age began in Europe in the 15th century?”

“The Age of Discovery. When ships crossed the sea to travel to distant lands.” Katagiri seemed to catch on as he answered. “Cultures and civilizations mixed together and ship battles became primarily fought with cannons. ...It was an age of artillery growth. By the time the Ottomans took Constantinople and stretched their reach far into the Mediterranean, Europe was primarily fighting with cannons. ...Is that right?”

“Testament.” Kiyomasa raised her hand again and then stabbed her other hand toward it. “With stronger artillery, the defense barriers also have to be stronger. But on the inner wall, a certain phenomenon begins to occur.”

She moved her hand.

She spread out the fingers of the stabbing hand without having it break through the wall hand.

It exploded.

“Do you understand what that means?”

Katagiri’s eyes widened.

He understood.

“The outer walls are one thing, but if you make the inner wall too strong, any shell that hits it will explode. And that will damage the inside of the outer wall

and any troops defending the outer wall.”

So...

“We stopped making solid defense barriers on the inside. Nowadays, we open several weaker barriers to softly catch the shells.”

Angie recalled a certain scene as she listened to Kiyomasa’s explanation.

*...That’s the same as the Musashi’s defense method.*

That was the Far East’s largest ship. Its defense barriers were controlled by automatons and they were powerful enough for use in combat.

Of course, just one of them was not strong enough to block any nation’s main cannon blast. They needed to open several of them in a row.

*...But they managed to survive Tres España’s powerful ether cannons like that...*

Musashi fell short in anti-air firepower, but they had solid anti-air defenses.

Before reaching the Battle of Mikatagahara, they had even survived a close-range attack from Matsunaga’s multi-ship Hiragumo.

Their defenses were incredibly strong against ship cannons or anything else with a detectable origin point and trajectory.

That was likely why Tres España had used a god of war unit to attack during the Armada battle. Gods of war could slip past the defense barriers, so they were ideal for attacking a ship like the Musashi. That was a testament to Felipe Segundo’s eye for tactics.

“Angie, are you thinking about something pointless?”

“Oh, yeah. Tes, tes. I am.” Angie lightly rapped her own head. “Whenever I get thinking like this, I end up settling on ‘well, whatever’.”

“I wish I could think that deeply about things,” said Yoshiaki while looking at her Magie Figur.

It displayed a map of Paris. And now that Katagiri had received Kiyomasa’s advice....

“Okay, I have one more request for you,” he said. “Can you target the gap between these inner defense barriers?”

“Testament, we’ll try.”

“Oh, you’re so cool, Kime-chan.”

“I only said try,” said Yoshiaki. “We might not succeed. ...But I doubt we’ll fail.”

There was no smile on her face. She spoke plainly but boldly while raising a slender hand into the air.

And...

“Come here, Weiss Fürstin.”

With those words, the area around her grew brighter.

Ether light sprayed from her hand.

“Good girl.”

She pulled out a long piece of metal painted pure white. It was the pair to Angie’s Schwarz Fürstin.

And there it was.

The sun had yet to rise, but Weiss Fürstin had a bright sheen like sunlight was washing over it.

Yoshiaki viewed it, slowly grabbed it, and spun it around.

She held it vertically and then turned toward Kiyomasa. She spoke in her usual tone of voice.

“We’ll be going then.”

**Llaf:** “Thou are leaving early. I was hoping I could go see thee off.”

**Kimee:** “You just do your own thing, leader. You’re eating breakfast, aren’t you?”

**6:** “Where are you going?”

*She hadn’t heard?*

*...That's Shouroku for you."*

As Angie gave an impressed nod, Yoshiaki opened a new Magie Figur.

It displayed a map of Houjou land.

"We're going to Houjou. We'll be stopping for supplies a few times, but we'll arrive during the day and stay at a hot spring for the night. We'll eat boat-wrap sushi at the inn and then go to war tomorrow."

**6:** "Will you bring me back something?"

**Kimee:** "Like victory?"

**6:** "Like hot spring manju."

**AnG:** "We'll be going to the ruins of the banana gator park, so we could buy you some gator meat."

**6:** "No, thanks."

**AnG:** "What about some bananas? You could be a monkey."

**6:** "Are you mocking me, #4?"

"Shouroku is so unsociable."

"I thought she might be off her game after yesterday's high damage, but it looks like I was wrong. ...So there's nothing to worry about. She'll be using Genbu to its fullest while she works today."

"That's right," agreed Angie.

"Sorry I'm late, everyone!"

A powerful voice reached them from across the deck.

They turned around to see a short-haired spear girl running their way.

"Kaniko, was it?"

"Yes! I'm Kani Saizou!"

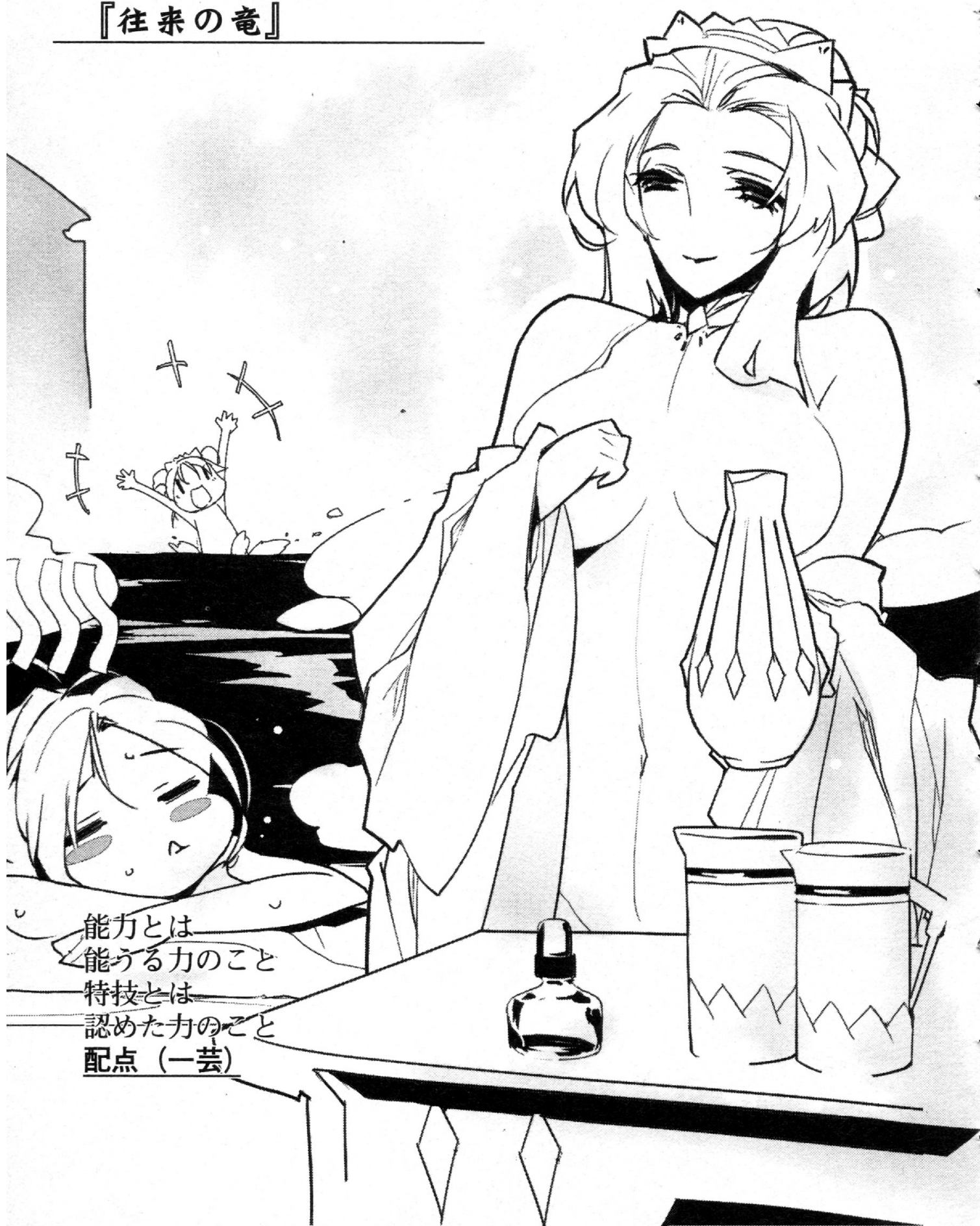
Kani ran up to them and then bowed at a perfect 90 degree angle.

"I look forward to accompanying you partway to Houjou!"

# Chapter 15: Dragon in Transit

# 第十五章

## 『往来の竜』



能力とは  
能うること  
特技とは  
認めた力のこと  
配点 (一芸)

*An ability*

*Is something you are capable of*

*A skill*

*Is something you are recognized for*

### **Point Allocation (Talent)**

"Going to Houjou, right? ...Yes, I can take you part of the way."

Yoshiaki confirmed what Kani had said.

She would be carrying Kani partway to Houjou. That was the role she had been given the night before.

Weiss Fürstin was a high-power *schale besen*, but an extra person would be no more than a burden. Any unfortunate movements could put them in danger during a high-speed flight, and...

*...It affects the fuel efficiency.*

Yoshiaki had better fuel efficiency than Angie. Angie could be absentminded and she tended to get careless in her flying when the scenery was nice, so Yoshiaki sometimes had to share Weiss Fürstin's fuel with her.

Of course, Angie often discovered useful things when she was not focused on her flying, so Yoshiaki did not stop her from doing that.

But this was a little different.

They had to reach Houjou quickly.

**Kimee:** "Is everything ready for Kani to be dropped off at the other end?"

**Kuro Take:** "Testament. A supply ship will be leaving P.A. Oda territory and some personnel were sent to Houjou to prepare for the Siege of Odawara."

**AnG:** "...Huh?"

"What is it, Angie?"

"Oh, um." Angie was unsure whether she should respond via Magie Figur or to Yoshiaki. "Kime-chan, which should I do?"

"Just shout real loud."

"Ahaaaahn!!"

Angie placed her hands on either side of her mouth and shouted. Then she turned back toward Yoshiaki.

"Sorry, that wasn't what you meant, was it?"

"As long as it's calmed you down."

Everyone on the deck had fallen silent, but they did not care.

**AnG:** "Takeko. What did you mean when you said some personnel were sent to Houjou for the Siege of Odawara?"

...Ah.

Yoshiaki had noticed that too.

What Takenaka had said made no sense. Because...

**AnG:** "We only learned last night that the Siege of Odawara is happening, right? So how could you have already sent them? ...Or are you saying they've already arrived?"

**Kuro Take:** "Testament. There are two people in P.A. Oda who can do that. Although one is a member of our Ten Spears."

"Yes," agreed Yoshiaki. "It shouldn't be a problem then. ...So it's someone with a great warrior's righteousness. With us and this underclassman here, we should be able to fight as a decent Hashiba force."

"Eh!? Me too!?"

"If you do your job well."

"I will!" Kani showed off her teeth with a smile. "I will do my best and achieve results! ...Is there anything else I need to watch out for!?"

□□凸: "E-excuse me. H-how is this person so cheerful, or bright, or whatever you would call it? ...Huh? That's odd. Aren't I supposed to be that kind of character? So why does my heart ache like this?"

**6:** "So in a week, he'll be one of us, huh?"

**Kuro Take:** "Fukushima-kun? Make sure Kani-kun isn't influenced by us. She still needs to command and work alongside our other subordinates."

**Llaf:** "Testament. I am not sure I wholly understand, but are thou saying it would be dangerous if she became like us? It is true I have difficulty imagining Kani-dono using the Giant Breasts Defense like Kiyo-dono..."

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Um, I don't actually have that bizarre skill..."

**AnG:** "Yeah, we can't have her turning out like this."

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Why are you people always like this?"

**Monkey Girl:** "Mi-chan? I need to make some final adjustments, so please come here."

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Y-yes! Testament! I'll be right there!"

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Mitsunari-sama seems like the cheerful type as well."

*Hmm, thought Angie as she looked up into the sky.*

*She thought about what Kani had said, but...*

*...Anything else she needs to watch out for.*

"Well, make sure you don't get so focused on achieving results that you lose sight of other things. Like taking care of yourself."

She took a breath.

"The Ten Spears have to make it back alive, so we can't have our Kanitama not making it back, now can we?"

Everyone working on the deck silently turned her way, but she ignored them.

On the other side of Kanitama, Yoshiaki briefly froze, but she soon recovered.

She looked to Angie and gave a thumbs up. That meant it was not a problem and she approved of what Angie had said.

Meanwhile, Kani responded to her line.

"Understood! I will do everything my upperclassmen say!"

"Oh, how disciplined. So what would you say if I asked you to go buy us drinks?"

"Eh?"

Unsure what to do, Kani's eyes wandered back and forth.

Angie reflexively followed that eye movement, but...

"Oh, how about this!"

Out of nowhere, Kani held out a paper cup.

And it contained...

"This is a drink born of the Age of Discovery idea that pepper is a panacea which has had a recent resurgence! It's called Doctor Pepper!"

"If I remember right, that doesn't actually have pepper in it and just has 21 different chemicals."

"Eh!? Really!? I was tricked!!"

"Then you can drink it as a punishment."

Kani held the cup in both hands and started drinking it. And after two seconds...

"It's bad! It tastes so bad!"

"Can I try some?"

"No! I can't let an upperclassman drink something so bad! I'll drink it!"

"Putting it like that really makes me want to try it."

"Then it's good! It tastes so good! I want to let an upperclassman drink something so good! I don't want to drink it!"

Yoshiaki glared at her.

"Isn't that going too far in the other direction?"

Angie had to agree.

But Angie also gave a deep nod in front of Kanitama.

"Okay, Kanitama, let me see what you can do."

Everyone on the deck started chanting "Chug! Chug!" as Kanitama gulped down the contents of the cup. Meanwhile, Yoshiaki pulled three harnesses out of her luggage.

She raised Weiss Fürstin behind Kanitama's back, and...

"Okay, stay still for a bit. I'm going to attach the harnesses."

"I finished drinking it!"

"Good girl, good girl. ...Now don't move."

"Eh!? U-umm."

"There are two Katous, so just call me Yoshiaki."

Kani nodded at that.

"Good point! Takenaka-san told me to use 'Giant Katou' and 'Massive Katou', but that doesn't really work, does it!?"

**AnG:** "Takeko, who are you trying to pick a fight with?"

**Kuro Take:** "But it's true, isn't it? In a certain way."

Angie was not going to ask what that certain way was, but Kamitama had been attached to Weiss Fürstin in the meantime.

The girl was strapped on around her torso, her waist, and her thighs.

"Umm, Yoshiaki-san! What are these straps for!?"

"We're about to leave for Houjou, so I've attached you to Weiss Fürstin. Get it now?"

"But! What about my luggage over there!"

There was indeed a woven bamboo carrying case on the deck.

It was surprisingly large. While it was not as tall as Kani herself, it would reach as high as her chest.

"That's pretty big. What's in it?"

"My futon!"

"...I thought the case was pretty big, but now I'm impressed at how well you compressed it."

"Thank you very much!!"

"Okay, let's get going."

Kani looked over at her carrying case.

"Eh!? What about my futon!?"

"You can find one once we arrive."

Yoshiaki said that while lightly hopping up.

She landed halfway up Weiss Fürstin as it stood vertically. For a winged Descended Angel, the angle and height of a *schale besen* was never an obstacle. She immediately dropped down in the pilot's seat.

"Let's get going before the sun rises. The ascent is going to be a pain, but it will be easier once we're horizontal again."

"Testament. Will you be going out ahead, Kime-chan?"

Yoshiaki simply nodded.

And while sitting in the vertical seat...

"Let's get going."

"Eh!? What do you mean I can find a futon once we arrive!? You can't know there will be one there!"

"You'll just have to put some effort into it."

With that, a powerful wind blew.

Angie looked forward, but there was no longer any sign of Weiss Fürstin or Yoshiaki's blonde hair.

There was only a sound resembling a cannon splitting the air and the cry of acceleration.

When she looked up into the early morning sky, she caught a brief glimpse of Weiss Fürstin's acceleration light.

*It's so pretty*, she thought, but...

"Whoops."

She had to pursue it.

She was supposed to be flying after Yoshiaki.

"So the Technohexen have left. I fought against and alongside them back before they were split between white and black."

A voice fell towards the dirt ground within Paris.

Someone looked up at two long strands of cloud rising into the sky which did not yet contain any sunlight.

"Sir Bernard, you have been commanding the dragons without taking any rest, so are you sure you don't need to sleep now?"

"When a dragon sleeps, they sleep for a long while. But this is human land. Something could go wrong."

An elderly man with his black hair tied back walked through the construction underway on the dirt road.

He was Bernard.

He turned to his right where a *Belle de Marionnette* followed one step behind.

"You said your name was Armand, didn't you? You seem to have helped quite a bit with the construction last night."

They were headed south to check over the city wall and the moat closest to Hashiba's camp.

"Today, we must fortify the inside of the moat. Armand, I assume you will be helping too?"

"With my wide-range gravitational control, yes."

Bernard nodded at that.

"Your strength rivals that of a large Terrestrial Dragon. I see the humans continue to create new technology."

"They may have created us, but it is up to us whether or not we will

cooperate with them."

"Do you dislike humans?"

When asked that, Armand reached for his hat and looked into the sky.

"*Belle de Marionnettes* cannot judge things by emotions such as like or dislike."

"Then how do you judge them?"

"Incomprehensible."

"Oh?" said Bernard as he slowed his pace.

He chose as path toward the city wall as he continued.

"What about them do you find incomprehensible?"

"How they give meaning to their decisions."

Armand adjusted his hat so the brim lined up with the city wall and he shut one eye.

He then looked left and right as if checking on the wall's structure.

"Losing this battle does not mean the destruction of the human race. Nor will it mean the end of Hexagone Française. The same is true for Hashiba and M.H.R.R. 'Working together' is always an option. But humans seem to have an instinct to protect their territory and way of life."

"We have something like that too."

"Of course you do." Armand spun his hat around with his finger. "Because you're human."

"I am a Celestial Dragon."

The subsequent pause lasted a few seconds.

Finally, Armand asked a question.

"You are?"

"I am."

"You look human to me."

"I have transformed."

"How?"

"Like this."

Bernard lowered his hips and thrust his right hand forward.

And while spinning around...

"Trans — Form!"

He nailed the transformation, so he took a breath while everyone in the street applauded.

The old man from a bakery held up a container of hops beer.

"Mr. Celestial Dragon! I think the two of us could get along! You're far better than my daughter's husband!"

Someone shouted "Yeah, and I think your daughter agrees with you!" and everyone grew a lot more lively.

They had all been basking in the morning stillness while doing construction work or preparing for the day.

But with Bernard as the focus, they began looking up and exchanging glances. But they soon forgot about Bernard and began their usual interactions with each other.

"Oh?" Armand viewed his surroundings. "Sir, you've woken up the city just by paying a visit to the dragons at the city wall. And more importantly..."

"Yes?"

"Were you serious with that 'transform' thing?"

"Of course I was. It was the usual ceremony. When a dragon takes on a human form, it feels like converging in on yourself, but when returning to your dragon form, you need some kind of symbol to return to your proper body. Although that symbol differs from person to person. ...We all have 'molds'. We can play around by taking on other forms, but that can be dangerous if we do not maintain our focus while changing back. Human forms make it especially

easy to lose sight of our 'mold'."

"I see." Armand nodded. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"800 years ago. ...Doing that made most of the humans flee, so it was popular among us dragons."

"So even Celestial Dragons don't like fighting, huh?"

"No living creature does."

"Wouldn't you do it if you knew 100% that you would win?"

Bernard responded immediately.

"I would not," he said. "That must never be the case."

Just then, the door to a nearby pub opened and the woman proprietor ran out with long strides.

It took her seven steps to reach them. She passed Bernard a bundle of skewered meat wrapped in leaves and smiled at him.

"I doubt that's anywhere near enough, but stop by tonight. We'll have plenty more for you then."

"————"

Bernard remained silent, but he pulled out one of the meat skewers and stared at it.

And as everyone silently watched on, he bit into it.

"Ah."

The woman proprietor's eyes widened as he ate the skewer right along with the meat.

There was an odd crunching as he tore through the skewer with his teeth and then he audibly swallowed.

But he ate it.

After swallowing, he let out a breath and a snort.

He looked to the woman proprietor and spoke.

"If you used a little less salt, it would taste nicely like blood."

Everyone cheered at his assessment.

The woman bowed respectfully, but then spun around and practically danced back into her pub. A traveling entertainer played his musical instrument in time with her dancing and someone raised a shout.

"The Landsknecht!"

"Indeed! We are the servants of god who will race to deadly lands for 4 *gulden*...!"

"Does that mean Protestant mercenaries are going to assist Hexagone Française in our fight against the Catholics...!?"

This improvised story had no real meaning.

Bernard and Armand simply continued to the city wall. But their path produced a wave of cheers, respectful looks from children, and interested voices from women.

"Well, Sir Bernard? ...What do you think of this lively city that was built by the previous generation?"

"Anne of Austria, you mean?"

Gazes turned toward Bernard from the windows and buildings along the road.

He turned his sharp bestial eyes on them, but none of them seemed to mind.

"That's not gonna work." Armand laughed. "Hexagone Française has as big a nonhuman unit as England. We're used to having bestial eyes on us."

"I have a question."

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Did Anne of Austria create the people of this city?"

"No, she didn't."

"Then were you born this way?"

"I was only made about 10 years ago, so I can't tell you that. Well, it's possible the previous generation set things up for how the people here act, but that

wasn't what clinched it."

"The current generation then?"

"Yes," said Armand as he put his hat back to normal and viewed their surroundings.

Construction was underway. The sounds of *Lourd de Marionnettes* walking and of bellowed commands came from seemingly empty roads.

The color of approaching dawn filled the eastern sky.

However...

"As the construction continues, the stealth barrier makes it look like the city's people are disappearing," said Bernard. "This level of defense and effort is not something I saw in the past."

"No, no. It might look like a lot, but it was recorded by two Technohexen as they ascended into the sky earlier. The enemy probably knows a lot of what we're doing."

"You saw them recording it?"

"They made a vertical ascent, so it's a safe assumption. That allows easier focusing of the footage than when moving away or approaching."

Bernard nodded at Armand's explanation. He also chewed apart another skewer of meat, wooden skewer and all.

"A vertical ascent is a way of avoiding dragons."

"Explain. I could always use more tactical lessons."

"Very well. ...We dragons generally fly using our thrusters, but due to our weight, we have difficulty making vertical ascents. And as living creatures, we have to worry about our breathing and body temperature, so we cannot remain active for long at extreme altitudes without any kind of equipment.

...Technohexen are light enough to pull it off, so in dragon-controlled territory they usually make powered descents and vertical ascents instead of horizontal take-offs and landings."

"When those Technohexen were taking you all on last night, they made a

vertical ascent beforehand, didn't they?"

"They must have had an excellent teacher."

"You're basically praising yourself there."

"I am not. I am merely stating a fact. ...The fact that dragons are superior to all."

Just as Bernard said that, the sun rose.

They were headed south, so the light rose into the sky on their left.

It appeared above the city wall, and...

"Good morning, my subjects!!"

They heard the Roi-Soleil's voice. It too came from the eastern city wall where the sun was rising.

The nudist was there.

Henri inspected the city while listening to the Roi-Soleil's morning greeting.

"Such wonderful weather today! As long as I remain in Paris, this land will always be filled with this pleasant atmosphere!"

His voice reached her on an eastern avenue and she saw the Roi-Soleil himself on the eastern wall.

But that was none of her concern at the moment.

She was not on bodyguard duty right now.

*...Because the musketeer unit must prepare for the defense of Paris.*

She was working with the *Belle de Marionnettes* under her command to check the simultaneous functioning of the defense and stealth barriers.

She stood before a 3m block of metal placed among the trees lining the road.

But this was no mere block of metal. It was a reinforcer for the Gallican terminal chapels set up around Paris.

Amplified by those, the terminal chapels opened the stealth and defense

barriers.

They were made by the Europa business guild, so they looked like white half-arches. The stealth ones bore a relief of the Roi-Soleil and the defense ones bore a relief of Terumoto swinging a wooden sword.

When the two were set up together, the full arch seemed to depict the Roi-Soleil rejoicing as he was pummeled with a wooden sword, but that may have been Europa's way of rebelling.

At any rate, the Roi-Soleil's voice reached her ears as she measured the output to make sure it was sufficient. His words were accompanied by light harpsichord music.

"Now, everyone, it is time for some light morning exercise. First, some hip twists. ...Ooone, twooo, threee, fooour. Can you feel the Roi-Soleil Power welling up in your loins?"

*Quiet down, Roi-Soleil.*

But this was a nice break for the people who had been working since late at night. A lot of them probably used his appearance as their sign to get to sleep.

*...There's no real reason to rush it, but it is important to do it together.*

Protecting a city was not something a single group of personnel could accomplish. If the entire city was not working together, the enemy would break through somewhere no matter how much they fortified the actual city's defenses.

That was what had happened at Magdeburg.

Henri understood it well since she had been there.

Magdeburg had used deflection-style defense barriers and had set them up within the city walls as well.

But due to the persistent attack from the front and the constant pressure from the flooded river on the side, the barriers had bent and then broken.

But what would have happened if more people had remained behind in Magdeburg?

*...Is it meaningless to think about that now?*

For a *Belle de Marionnette*, past events were only used as a basis on which to predict future events.

But there was one thing not even that idea could make happen: allowing Roi-Soleil Louis Exiv to meet Anne of Austria.

What should she have done and when?

"———"

She did not know.

Of course, knowing would only lead to the regret of not having done so. Then she would once more search for a reason why she could not have done it.

Past distortions only led to never-ending guesses and assumptions because they were already over.

In that case...

*...Perhaps I should end this with what the Princess said.*

*"We were glad to have you with us."*

What had that meant?

For one thing, Terumoto's words concerning Anne's death had not reached Anne.

They only provided self-satisfaction.

But then why did Henri sense some logical acceptance of it?

If she could understand that, she guessed she would make more progress in the present instead of using so much processor time on the past.

She cursed her lack of memory space.

"Honestly..."

She looked up to the eastern wall and saw the Roi-Soleil stretching.

His hair formed a flare and he produced his own light on top of the morning sunlight.

"Heh. My subjects, now that we have completed our morning Soleil Stretches, let us begin the morning greeting. ...Good morning, everyone. It is I, the Roi-Soleil. Disappointed it isn't Terumoto, aren't you?"

Henri found herself disrespectfully agreeing with him.

He then frowned and nodded. He swung his head down thrice.

"I too would prefer Terumoto! Why have the likes of me rise so early in the morning!? I've risen in the morning? Is that supposed to be a euphemism, Terumoto!?"

"Hey, Mouri-01."

In a cypress bath with a view of the rising sun through the window, Terumoto rolled over with a towel on her head.

She rolled onto her stomach as if embracing the edge of the tub.

"I thought I would listen in on what was happening back there while enjoying this morning bath, but this is what I find? Just end the divine transmission."

"Testament. Should I play some music?"

Mouri-01 was mixing some shampoo and Terumoto put a hand on her chin.

"Hmm," she groaned with a tilt of the head. "The divine radio stations would be different here, wouldn't they?"

Mouri-03 responded to Terumoto's doubt by opening a *signe cadre* in the bath. She pulled a divine radio station broadcast list from a local newspaper company.

"The Shinto stations should be the same as ours, even if they're a little less unique."

At the same time, another *signe cadre* appeared.

It showed Mouri-02 down on the surface. She bowed with a large Shinto shrine behind her.

"These are the ones that have been approved back home."

A few select stations appeared.

Terumoto noticed some local ones in addition to ones that used the Shinto network to cover the entire Far East.

"Oh, there's a lot in the Fierce Monk style. I guess you have to be wild with the strings if you want to be popular."

"Terumoto, you really do like those rude songs."

"We can leave the polite stuff to Exiv. Mouri-02, thanks."

"Hee hee," laughed Mouri-01. "As your maid, it's a relief to see how well you get along."

"Is that so, is that so?"

Terumoto wiped off her face with the towel. She was wiping off the sweat. She then reached for Mouri-02's *signe cadre* which already had links attached to the list of stations.

"Okay," she said and a cheerful personality began speaking over the divine transmission.

"This week on the serial drama 'The Wu-rst', Sun Ce-kun fired his doctor for giving him the Wu-rst diagnosis, but now his mind is rapidly deteriorating. The next entry is titled Sun Ce Dies. I can't wait to find out what happens."

"Oh, this region would be pro-Wu, wouldn't they?"

After flipping through a few different stations, Terumoto spoke to Mouri-01.

"Tell that idiot to be quiet since I'm in the bath."

"The bath!? You're in the bath, Terumoto!?"

Henri saw her leader jumping up and down like an overexcited elementary schooler.

He placed a hand on his forehead and bent backwards.

"Heh. First thing in the morning and you're already filling me with doubt, Terumoto! In these two days without you...or has it been three days? Either

way! The Roi-Soleil cares not for details!"

**Ar-Man:** "Hey."

**An-Ri:** "Just keep quiet and watch. ...And the watching part is optional."

But the Roi-Soleil turned toward Paris with a *signe cadre* in hand.

"Listen, everyone! While all of you are working to protect Paris, Terumoto has gone to Houjou as a representative of Mouri and she is apparently taking a bath there!"

*Why tell everyone that?* wondered Henri.

Just then the *signe cadre* exploded as the Roi-Soleil held it overhead.

He spun four times as he flew northward, but he soon returned to his original location. And he opened a new *signe cadre*.

"Heh. Feeling shy, Terumoto? But I am willing to accept that side of you."

He now had an enormous afro, but he fixed it with a single stroke of his right hand.

He confirmed he was positioned right in front of the sun and then took a breath.

He spread his arms and legs while the sun slowly rose behind him.

And he shook his head so his flare hair whipped behind him.

"Heh. Watch, my subjects, as the sun and I become one!"

*A Belle de Marionnette* under Henri's command sent her a divine transmission.

"Lady Henri! The sun is aligned with the Roi-Soleil's crotch! ...There's no stopping him with Lady Terumoto gone, is there!?"

It had indeed been awhile since the Roi-Soleil's stopper had been absent.

But then he crossed his arms and put on a flat expression.

"Now, then..."

**An-Ri:** "Roi-Soleil, the sun has risen some, so it's shifted a bit out of place."

He stood up on his toes.

"Now, then..."

Henri decided it was best not to say anything more as he raised his right hand.

"Let us continue our talk, my subjects."

The people had begun to ignore him, but now they turned back his way.

With their attention on him, he nodded once and spoke softly.

"Everyone...it is very unfortunate that Terumoto is not with us today. We all feel the same way, so we are brothers and sisters in this matter, my subjects."

What he said made enough sense that Henri nearly found herself believing him.

But there really was no one to stop him without Terumoto around.

"Listen, my subjects. The climax is tomorrow. ...Hashiba is sure to attack us using methods the likes of which we have never seen. They have the power and the skill to do so. ...So do not hold back as you prepare the conqueror's city. We have vainglory and pride. But being proud does not imply a lack of skill. Make your preparations such that we can have pride in the skill we do in fact have."

Everyone had come to a stop.

Even the rumbling of *Lourd de Marionnette* footsteps had ceased. There was only one thing below the quiet morning sky.

The Roi-Soleil with the sun behind him.

The French nudist lowered from his tiptoes.

He took a breath and continued with a smile.

"The climax is tomorrow. But Hexagone Française's climax is not tomorrow. We still have much greater heights to reach as the conquerors of Europe. ...Then do you know whose climax is tomorrow, my subjects?"

It would be...

"Hashiba and M.H.R.R.'s climax. They face decline after conquering the Far East and after the Thirty Years' War and they also face the Oda clan's decline.

We are merely accompanying them as their climax begins. ...It is unfortunate Terumoto could not be with us. We have the privilege of seeing the climax of a group fearing their own ruin and decline. This is a scene we will never see in ourselves, so it is entirely unnecessary as reference material. But it will help relieve my sorrow."

The Roi-Soleil slowly moved.

He pointed toward heaven and then to the east.

He breathed in and raised his voice.

"Vive la Anne!"

Henri then heard inhalations across all of Paris.

A moment later, everyone moved in unison. She even heard the rumbling and mechanical noises of *Lourd de Marionnettes* beyond the stealth barriers.

"Vive la Anne...!"

"Enough!"

The Roi-Soleil swept his hand to the side.

In an instant, everyone held their breath and tensed up.

There was stillness, but it was more than mere silence. Everything that should have moved had stopped to forcibly create this motionless atmosphere.

But even without motion, there was intensity.

And the Roi-Soleil smiled as their gazes fell on him.

"I must apologize for using Anne as a tool to build morale. Not even the sun of pride can hope to match that lively star of guidance."

So...

"Let us follow that star's guidance, everyone. ... The moon will return before long, but we must prepare this sleepless fortress before then."

"Ridiculous... Let's stay an extra week visiting hot springs."

"Hee hee. Princess, did the Roi-Soleil's wonderful speech make you blush?"

"I'm not blushing," insisted Terumoto as she turned to look out the window.

Sunlight entered through it.

And since she had needed to turn around to see the sunlight...

"We were facing in the same direction."

She wiped off her face with the towel.

"He's the type to check on that kind of thing if he can. I'm the type to accept it if it happens to happen. But..."

But...

"I'm vainglorious. Even if I don't like being alone, I can't bring myself to say it. ...And he probably needs some more time to cool his head a little."

"Oh, dear. But, Princess?"

"What?"

Mouri-01 poured out some more mixed shampoo as she answered.

"Do you really think the sun can cool?"

"The moon would never get along with him if he couldn't."

Terumoto looked the other way and messed with the divine radio stations.

"Hm? We can get Musashi ones on here?"

"Probably because they have their stealth barrier down. ...Princess, let me wash your hair."

"Sure, sure."

When she held out her head, her bangs covered her face.

Mouri-01 smiled with that head and a bucket of bathwater in front of her. She stuck her finger in the water to measure the temperature and checked the reading on the *signe cadre* that appeared above the finger. She nodded.

"Princess, it's a little hot, so I will redo it."

"Oh? ...No, this is pretty lukewarm."

"But it is a little hot for your hair. And you have official duties today, so I will

add extra yuzu."

"Isn't that a little much?"

"It should help wake you up."

"Then you might as well. ...Okay."

Mouri-01 let the contents of a small plate drip onto Terumoto's hair and Terumoto made an amused comment as it soaked in.

"That's cold."

The morning light created a dimly-lit space.

It was a triangular pyramid tent.

"Kh..."

The Reine des Garous awoke below a blanket by the tent's edge.

Her daughter slept next to her, creating the scent of a "pack" that she had not sensed in a while. Her adorable daughter had a mixture of her and her husband's scents. That wolf had inherited so much but had also begun her own independent life.

But she was curious about one thing concerning her daughter's relationships. She was likely to find out about it today, but...

*...It's about her king.*

She had a question there.

Just how important was her daughter to that king?

She thought she had some understanding of that.

*But*, she thought as she rolled from her side to her stomach. And...

"Oh?"

There was an arm in her cleavage.

"\_\_\_\_\_"

This was unusual, so she stopped moving.

There were in fact two arms there.

*...Oh, now I get it.*

"That would explain the dirty dream about having my husband in there."

When she freed the two arms, they crawled back to their owner. On the way, they looked back and gave a reluctant wave, so she waved back.

"Now, then."

The Reine des Garous lifted her butt, stretched, and took a deep, deep breath. And then...

"Heh heh."

She silently moved across her daughter.

She looked to Musashi's princess on the other side.

*...Why is she sleeping with her eyes open?*

The arms had already returned, but she remained entirely stiff as she slept.

And the Reine des Garous's daughter's king was beyond her.

"...I wonder."

Determining his relationship with her daughter would be easy. She only had to smell him from up close.

She had already done that plenty after abducting him in Hexagone Française, but...

*...If there hasn't been any progress, I'll have to scold you a little.*

They had to be fighting a series of intense battles.

He would need a knight, so her daughter's scent should have grown stronger. But if it had not...

"Oh?"

She detected her daughter's scent, just like she had in the clearing the night before.

But it did not come from him.

*...His blanket.*

Yes. Her daughter's scent came from the blanket covering him.

And oddly enough, it came from the bottom end.

"Sniff..."

When she sniffed it, she detected several scents on that king's blanket. From head to toe, there was a gradation of different people's scents.

Starting from the top end, she found the Asama Shrine Representative, Musashi's princess, the king himself, and lastly her daughter.

The four scents were lined up on the blanket.

And the Reine des Garous realized how the scents would end up on the blanket like that.

*...Oh.*

Given the size, the king's feet would stick out if it was turned on its side. In fact, the same would be true for her daughter, their princess, and the Asama Shrine Representative.

But this king had chosen what he could do in that moment.

"...Testament."

The Reine des Garous felt a smile on her lips as she returned to her spot.

She no longer felt a need to smell him again.

For a wild wolf, giving someone a place to sleep held great meaning. When the forest had stopped feeling like home and she had nearly lost herself, she had met the person who had given her her current home.

Whether her daughter wanted it or not, there was someone who would give the girl a home.

Her daughter was being taken care of. So...

"I should probably spend the day making sure she is behaving properly. As the Reine des Garous's daughter, as a citizen of Hexagone Française, and as the second in line to the Far East."

She sat back down on her blanket.

Her daughter slept on her side like she always had. No, when she was little, she had slept with her belly defenselessly exposed. The Reine des Garous had always placed a blanket over her then, but now...

"You've grown into a proper knight."

She smiled.

"I look forward to seeing where you go from here."

Just then, the blanket on the other side shot up into the air.

That was the Asama Shrine Representative.

"Wah...!"

She pulled a sign frame out of her cleavage. It was vibrating, but it soon disappeared.

"Kimi! I don't need an 'it's purification time' message!"

She twisted around a bit, but then noticed the Reine des Garous.

"Ah," she said. "G-good morning. Um, uh..."

She frantically looked away and reached for the change of clothes folded next to her.

"I'll be at the bath for my morning purification!"

"Yes, go ahead. ...Take care."

The girl groaned a little and blushed.

But she soon stood up and kept her footsteps quiet as she left the tent. The Reine des Garous smiled as she watched the girl go.

*...That girl.*

There had been a whitish mark of a dried liquid in the corners of her eyes.

She must have been crying below her blanket the night before.

A multitude of feelings had spilled out while she used a borrowed arm as a pillow.

# Chapter 16: Those Looking up at the Azure Sky

# 第十六章

## 『蒼天下の見上げ人達』



朝の時間  
人は二種類に分かれる  
配点 (テンション)

*The morning*

*Divides people into two categories*

### **Point Allocation (Energy Level)**

The morning sun had risen.

The sunlight began to carry heat down to the forest below.

There were two large movements above the dark green roof of leaves.

One was the giant 8-ship aerial city ship turning to the south.

The other was a transport ship ascending from the forest and to that giant ship.

There was no optimal spot for viewing those movements in the sky.

They could be seen from anywhere.

But from the surface, a sign frame was visible on the ascending transport ship's stern.

The large sign frame displayed the Marube-ya logo and a farewell message: "To the people of Sanada: Thank you for allowing Musashi Ariadust Academy's third year classes to visit. The ruins were crushed and smashed up a lot in a serious battle, but you should be able to look back on it and laugh in a few years. As a way of saying goodbye, the Marube-ya will be gifting you divine figurines from Musashi's divine figurine manufacturer Decorative Kaikei<sup>[5]</sup> on a first come first serve basis! Hurry up and send a divine transmission to the following Inari compressed prayer!"

According to the Treasurer's aide...

**Marube-ya:** "That will prevent Sanada from sending any anti-air fire toward the transport ship! We have plenty of inventory, so we'll just hand out harsh evil god ones or Western ones that don't sell."

**Novice:** "Won't that just make them want to attack us even more?"

**Flat Vassal:** "So this is goodbye to Sanada. Today is still the last day of the study camp and we still have a lot to do, but more than enough has already

happened, hasn't it?"

**Hori-ko:** "Judge. Adele-sama, I have determined you have had a rough time since the previous night. But while it happened quite a few times, most of it can be summed up by saying you were 'slammed into things'. ...Oops, this was one of those times when I should have been more tactful, wasn't it?"

**Flat Vassal:** "Why do you always steer the conversation in such awful directions!?"

But during that exchange, there was movement on the surface.

Three figures stood in the forest and looked up at the transport ship.

"Anayama, how long are you going to stare up at them?"

They were three members of the Sanada Ten Braves. It was Anayama and...

"Because this is goodbye for a while, Nezu-kun, Yuri-kun. ...I suppose we won't see them again until Osaka. Whether we do or not will depend on how we're used, but this is goodbye regardless."

The Musashi turned and the transport ship flew above their heads.

Anayama looked up at the giant ship visible through the trees.

He felt like he had been watching it forever, but...

"This may be the first time I've seen it moving during the day and from this close."

He watched the Musashi move below the sun.

*...And it's close to the first time I've seen it from below.*

Before, he had seen it moving along the national borders. He had observed it then and sold the information to other nations, but he had never focused on its presence *to this extent*.

At IZUMO, the Musashi had been in a dock. The same was true at the Ariake.

The only other time he had seen it moving would be when he jumped off of it at night during the Battle of Mikatagahara, when he jumped off after infiltrating

at the Ariake, and when it had arrived at Sanada during the night.

He had associated the ship with the night.

But now that he was seeing it move during the day, it was leaving.

And in that sense...

“That ship may be a good match for ninjas like us...”

With that, he turned back toward Nezu.

“Nezu-kun, was that ‘...' correct?”

“I think so. But you mustn’t be so accepting of our opponent. I would add a ‘How ironic...' to the end.”

“I see! This is really tricky!”

“Are you two okay?” asked Yuri. The glasses girl had her long hair tied back. “Anyway, the young master said he was leaving.”

“Yes, he does have some people he needs to greet at our destination. It would probably be best to let him go on ahead. I don’t like leaving him without a bodyguard, but he has his pride,” said Anayama. “Also, Mochizuki-kun sent us a smoke signal message when she was cooking breakfast. Kakei-kun’s group is working with Hashiba to complete the history recreation of the 2nd Siege of Ueda in Houjou land.”

“...Kakei is doing that?” asked Nezu.

Anayama nodded.

*...I just hope he isn’t pushing himself too hard.*

But what he said was different.

“Those three should be fine. And the young master has chosen to leave because he sees what they are doing for him. So the entire Nobushige faction will be going to Osaka. ...Only the Nobuyuki faction and the people of Sanada will remain here.”

“So the young master is leaving...” muttered Nezu.

“Ah,” said Yuri as if she had just realized something. “But doesn’t it hurt our

pride to leave the young master without a bodyguard?”

“Not to worry. Intelligence gathering is another part of our job. We need to look into the other clans of the east and west before we regroup with him.”

“...Testament. I’ll look at it like that.” Yuri lowered her shoulders but then she looked up into the sky. “The Musashi is moving.”

She took a few steps forward. The trees must have blocked her view of the ship.

She stepped out into the sun and narrowed her eyes toward the Musashi.

“I hate to admit it, but it’s really pretty.”

“Building that ship was the only way the Far East had to demonstrate its pride while under provisional rule.”

It was a white and black ship. It was armed now, but below the sunlight, those cannons and thrusters looked like decorations.

Nezu commented on it without even looking up. He brushed up his long bangs as he did so.

“It’s an enemy ship.”

“But it’s a symbol of the Far East.”

“It’s our enemy. When we became Unneeded, I felt a forced sense of resignation, but when Isa died, I felt a continuation of hostility.”

“...There it is. Nezu-kun, your words are always like a drawn knife.”

“You’re exaggerating.”

Nezu looked away and Anayama mimicked the movement a few seconds later.

“Like this!?”

“No. Like this.”

Nezu showed him an example. And with his gaze still cast downward...

“You don’t just swing your vision around. You have to decide on a destination in advance. That way you show you have real conviction.”

“Incredible, Nezu-kun!”

“You two...”

Yuri walked across the grass next to Nezu and let her shoulders droop.

“Can we get back now?”

She looked over, but found the two boys staring intently at her.

*Eh?* she thought in confusion.

Then Anayama nodded and said “do it”.

Yuri frowned, but Nezu gave her a sharp look.

“...Fine.”

She sighed and angled her body as if to signal the end of this sudden turn of events.

“Like this?”

She hung her head and looked away like Nezu had before.

And she stopped.

After a few seconds, she straightened up again. He had a hand on his forehead.

“...Why don’t you get it?” he asked.

“I-it was my first time.”

“Yuri-kun, I’m impressed you can stay with Nezu-kun.”

“I-I’m not ‘with’ him.” She quickly shook her head. “We stay in separate rooms, we use separate wallets, and I don’t look after him.”

“But you want to do those things, don’t you?”

Yuri spread her mouth horizontally at Anayama’s question. Then she reached for the scythe swords at her hips.

“Say anything more and I’ll make you regret it.”

“Yuri, dig in your heels here and you’re going to regret it.”

“Nezu-kun! Nezu-kun! You have no self-awareness do you!?”

After saying that, Anayama did something other than continue speaking.

He laughed quietly. It was a relaxing laugh that changed the mood. And he looked up into the southern sky.

“Ohh, the Musashi has already finished turning.”

“And it looks like the transport ship is on route for the Okutama.”

“Testament,” agreed Anayama. “They’re going to continue their study camp like that. Most likely, their negotiations with Mouri will begin once they arrive in Houjou territory. I wonder what our trio is doing there. I hope they’re feeling good about the deal they worked out for the 2nd Siege of Ueda.”

Yuri thought about those upperclassmen who were not here with them.

*...Kakei, Unno, and Mochizuki.*

They were the calm ones of the group. Unno could be more influenced by the mood, but she never forgot to focus on the big picture and she was a reliable upperclassman.

But Yuri had a question.

“Why are those three joining the Houjou battle for the 2nd Siege of Ueda?”

“To send us to the next stage,” immediately replied Anayama.

But Yuri was not sure what he meant.

“The next stage?”

“Testament. They are sending Sanada to Osaka.” He raised his thumb toward the sky. “Listen. During the Battle of Sekigahara, Sanada will be split in two. ... Masayuki-sama and our young master, Nobushige-sama, will join Hashiba’s Western Army and face Matsudaira’s Eastern Army. The young master’s brother, Nobuyuki-sama, will join Matsudaira’s Eastern Army and face his own father and brother. Ueda Castle fights to stop Hidetada, who is Matsudaira’s heir, and Nobuyuki-sama’s forces.”

She knew that. Anyone in Sanada would hear it over and over again.

“But,” cut in Yuri. “During Sekigahara, Hidetada’s orders are delayed and he

does not show up in time. And even though Masayuki-sama and our young master achieve victory at the 2nd Siege of Ueda, they are defeated due to the Eastern Army's victory at Sekigahara."

"Testament. That is correct. ...But there are two things we must do first."

Yuri listened intently to Anayama.

She realized she had fallen for his skills as an orator as a question entered her mind.

*...Two things we must do?*

The sun had risen higher into the sky. She knew the cicadas would start crying soon and Anayama raised two fingers in front of her.

"First, Sanada must preserve and strengthen its forces. ...The age is moving quickly now, so if a small nation like Sanada loses its forces, we will have no way of recovering in time."

"...I seem to recall our strongest Terrestrial Dragon and two of our Celestial Dragons retired recently."

"And we can't have anything like that happen again. Those dragons are like a one-being army when they aren't up against people like Musashi's main fighters."

Yuri was convinced by the heartfelt tone to his voice.

And he continued with a sigh.

"Listen. There is one other thing we must do: settle our relationships with the other nations. Sanada is constantly fighting and reconciling with Houjou, Uesugi, and Matsudaira. And that is something of a problem."

"How is that a problem?" she asked. "That kind of fighting is part of the history recreation, so it's our duty, isn't it?"

"Yuri. ...And what if that wears down our forces?"

She knew what Nezu was saying.

But it was still their duty based on the Testament.

"We just have to make sure we keep our losses to a minimum and-..."

“Sanada is a small nation, Yuri-kun.” Anayama cut her off. “The large neighboring nations will try to wear down our forces to make sure our history recreations do not get in their way.”

“You have no proof that they’ll-...”

“Then,” said Anayama. “During the Osaka Campaign, our young master and we reach Matsudaira’s camp during a charge. So what do you think they will do to mitigate that threat?”

“— — — —”

“Do you understand now?”

She did.

They would wear down Sanada’s forces before the Osaka Campaign. That would weaken their ability to make a charge and help Matsudaira escape that threat. So...

“You think that’s what Matsudaira is going to do...?”

“It won’t necessarily be only Matsudaira, Yuri-kun.”

...*Then...*

“What are our upperclassmen doing at Houjou?”

“They are trying to use the Houjou battle as a way of eliminating one of our battles with another nation. That way the other nation won’t be able to interfere with us.”

“...And that battle is the 2nd Siege of Ueda?”

“Correct.” Anayama smiled. “I think Kakei-kun’s group made an excellent decision here. The 2nd Siege of Ueda is a localized battle primarily fought while holing up in a castle. That is something ninjas excel at.”

“But how is that supposed to correspond with the Houjou battle?”

“From the castle’s perspective, the flooding of Houjou can be seen as ‘holing up in a castle’. And there is someone else who has a definite history recreation along those lines.”

Just as Anayama lowered the ends of his eyebrows while still smiling, the

cicadas began to cry.

His voice joined the insects.

“Takigawa Ichimasu. Her Siege of Kanie Castle during the Battle of Komaki Nagakute is the same. And if Kakei-kun’s group supports her, Hashiba is sure to accept Sanada’s request. The request to have the Siege of Kanie Castle double as the 2nd Siege of Ueda. ...That is how they have decided to support Sanada’s future.”

“Heyyyy, Kakei. How’s breakfast comiiiiing?”

“Ah!? I can’t hear you!”

“You iiiidiot!”

“You’re the idiot!”

“Oh, so you can hear meee! You iidiot! Yes, you! An iiiidiot!”

“I can understand the simple words! The waves are just really loud! Look!”

Kakei waved from a pier with his shirt off.

They were at the ocean.

*...The ocean!*

They had lived in Kansai once, so he had seen the inland Mediterranean Sea before.

*...Far Easterners: the people who like calling the Seto Inland Sea the Mediterranean but don’t call Osaka Bay the Persian Gulf!*

No one else might share that motto, but that was the way he saw it.

Regardless, this was different.

“It’s the Pacific! The Pacific Ocean!”

“Kakei-sama, stop showing out-of-character excitement and catch some fish for breakfast.”

“I’m ready to fire some bullets, but I’m not seeing any fish between the waves.”

He looked back toward the rock stove built on the beach at the base of the pier. Mochizuki was there in a track suit and Unno with a swimsuit in place of her top.

Mochizuki was cooking a pot of soup and...

“The rice will be ready soon. I steamed it in leaves, so I have determined it should be somewhat hard.”

“You’re incredible, Mochizuki,” said Unno. “Ahh, and it smells so good. Now if only we had some fish to go with it...”

“Stop putting pressure on me.”

But he could not see any good fish as the waves crashed.

He took a firing pose and remained motionless, but Unno pointed toward the beach.

“Over here! On the beach end of the pier! You need to aim where the waves are calmer!”

“There’s nothing but small fish around there. Do you understand that?”

“Throw out that pride! You need to face the reality of our breakfast!”

“My bullets won’t leave much left of a small fish. Do you understand *that*?”

“Then couldn’t you use some other method?” asked Mochizuki.

*Hmm*, thought Kakei.

He did carry around hidden needles, but...

*...Those are for giving to Nezu.*

So he was hesitant to use them.

“What about those long needles you are often passing to Nezu-sama?”

Mochizuki was sharp, but Unno tapped on her shoulder.

And she gave a rare smile.

“Mochizuki, that’s a death flag.”

*...Don’t sound so gentle when you say that.*

But Mochizuki...

“Once he gives all of those to Nezu-sama, he will die in his next battle, won’t he?”

“Yes, that’s right. And that’s why Nezu will count the thousand needles he’s been given, find that seven are missing, and get mad that it doesn’t add up.”

“You love making Nezu jokes as much as Anamaya does, don’t you?”

“Of course. He’s our cute underclassman.”

He knew what she meant by that. Nezu was a good underclassman who showed real trust in them. But...

“Make sure you don’t overlook his actual skill, though.”

“Says the guy who can’t even catch some breakfast.”

With that, Unno waved at him.

And in that instant...

...*Oh*.

Something flew his way. He swung his left hand on reflex and grabbed some objects in front of his face. They wobbled from the snap of his wrist.

“Skewers?”

“They’re spare parts for my fan frames. Since they got broken a bit before.”

There were 7 of them.

They were the perfect weight. They were made of bamboo, but they must have been carefully selected because they were well balanced. So...

“I’ll be using these.”

“Yes, yes. Feel free. ...You and Mochizuki did well last night, so I have to repay you for being no help.”

Kakei stopped moving at that.

Unno was talking about the negotiation.

They had discussed what had happened and what they were going to do.

Unno had complained about not getting to join them, but...

“Well, if I’d been there, I might have been too aggressive with that Takigawa woman and messed up the negotiation.”

“Wouldn’t it have been easier for another woman to speak with her? Y’know, to pick up on some subtleties I probably missed.”

“...Kakei-sama, do you not recall my gender?”

“Ohh, sorry. Like really sorry...”

But despite all that, they had taken an “all’s well that ends well” stance.

And that was why she was lending him these bamboo frame parts now.

Of course, he was fairly certain she would have lent them regardless, but...

*...We have a way of making excuses for these things when we can.*

They knew each other well, but they each specialized in different fields. They had their pride and they tended to avoid any sense of sharing anything.

They kept things that way because they were “Unneeded”.

What had things been like between them before that?

*...Well, it doesn’t matter.*

But things had changed. They were starting down a different path for Sanada and for themselves.

So...

“Okay, let’s do this.”

Kakei raised the bamboo frame pieces.

*God. You listening?*

*...Please, just watch me like always. I’ll lose all my dignity as a man if I can’t catch some fish.*

He made that mental request and then released them.

It was more like sending them forth than throwing them. And...

“—————”

The bamboo frame pieces vanished from his hand.

And eventually...

“Kakei.”

He heard Unno’s dispirited voice.

“I thought you said you couldn’t catch small fish?”

Some pierced fish were flopping around at the surface by the beach end of the pier.

Kakei jumped into the water to retrieve his catch.

And then he walked up onto the beach.

“I knew we would have to wait for a while, but I didn’t think we would end up essentially camping out here.”

The saltwater reminded him of the inland sea when they were back in Kansai.

It had been a long time. The feeling of sand slipping between his toes as the waves receded really took him back. The taller waves may have been a trait of non-inland seas.

The wave eventually lowered from knee height to shin height.

“Here.”

He was using his hat to carry the fish and he dropped them in front of Mochizuki. She used her gravitational control to solidify the wet sand into a cutting board.

“Thank you very much.”

This meant they could finish cooking breakfast.

Kakei felt relief and an odd sense of amusement at that as he looked up into the sky.

This was the Odawara coast. They were in the east. And when he looked overhead...

“Is that Mouri’s aerial fleet in the west toward Atami?”

“It really looks like they’re trying to keep their distance from us.”

“They probably are.” Kakei looked to a spring water pool on the edge of the coast. “Even if the Siege of Odawara is being used for a number of different battles, there are basically three poles here.”

“Do you mean Houjou, Mouri, and Hashiba?”

“Testament. Even if we join in for the 2nd Siege of Ueda, we’re really only helping Takigawa-san of Hashiba. ...Since Hashiba pretty much is the Testament Union now, we can make a deal for Sanada’s future by helping her.”

Meaning...

“If we can help Takigawa-san with her battle and also complete the 2nd Siege of Ueda, we can preserve Sanada’s forces, give them a path to Osaka, and bring them some peace.”

“But what are we going to do? Takigawa has lost most of her forces.”

Mouri’s aerial fleet was in the western sky and the Houjou fleet was beyond that.

Those were powerful forces, but just as Unno had hinted...

“Takigawa-sama has lost the Shirasagi Castle, so she will be acting as a ground force. And the three of us must act as the Sanada forces during the 2nd Siege of Ueda.”

“If we think of the Ten Braves as worth a thousand warriors each, then we should be good.”

Kakei rubbed his cheek as he said that.

The seawater was already starting to dry.

The sounds of the waves were dying down, but that just meant he could hear the cicadas in the forest and hills. The temperature was only going to rise.

*...Such a nice summer.*

He stopped himself before adding the very un-ninja-like thought of “if not for all the battles”.

The ocean had him feeling more energetic than usual.

It would be dangerous if this made them miss Sanada land. And the three here would know that.

That land had accepted them as “Unneeded”. Their thoughts only turned in that direction when they had nothing else to rely on.

In other words, when their skills proved useless and they were in danger.

*...And we need to avoid a situation like that.*

However...

“We don’t really know what the other two ‘poles’ will do,” said Kakei.

“Aren’t they going to fight their battles?” asked Unno.

“The third pole, Takigawa-san, will probably do that, yes.”

Kakei hesitated a moment, but he decided to head to the spring to wash his body.

He set off walking along the sand.

The beach did not extend very far back. Only about 20 meters.

He felt like he was grabbing at a thin cloth with the bottom of his feet.

“But, you see. Like Takigawa-san said last night, Houjou and Mouri are in a bit of a different situation from Hashiba. Especially Mouri. So if the two of them decide to work together...”

“We’ll be the only ones fighting?”

Unno was sharp.

But he did not know the answer here. There was only one thing he could say at this stage.

“That’s probably not how it’ll be.”

He did not know what Mouri and Houjou were thinking, but if they were after *what he thought they were...*

*...Then I’m jealous.*

Mouri, Houjou, and Musashi would bring about something quite ridiculous.

“They’ll be causing a battle on a much larger scale than the ones for Houjou and Mouri.”

Ahead of him, the spring water was overflowing onto the beach.

The water stained the white sand a burnt brown, creating what looked like a crack, but it disappeared partway through.

He moved his foot forward and stepped in the crack of overflowing spring water.

*...It’s cold.*

“Hey.”

“What is it?” asked Unno.

Kakei rethought what he wanted to say.

He looked back to see Mochizuki dropping the fish meat from the sand cutting board and into the pot. Unno was watching it too.

The cicada cries were louder than the waves and Kakei spoke over both.

“I caught seven, so are we dividing them 2, 2, and 3 with the 3 going to me?”

“I supplied the bamboo frame parts.”

“And I cooked them.”

*Our girls don’t like to back down, do they?* he thought while waving at them.

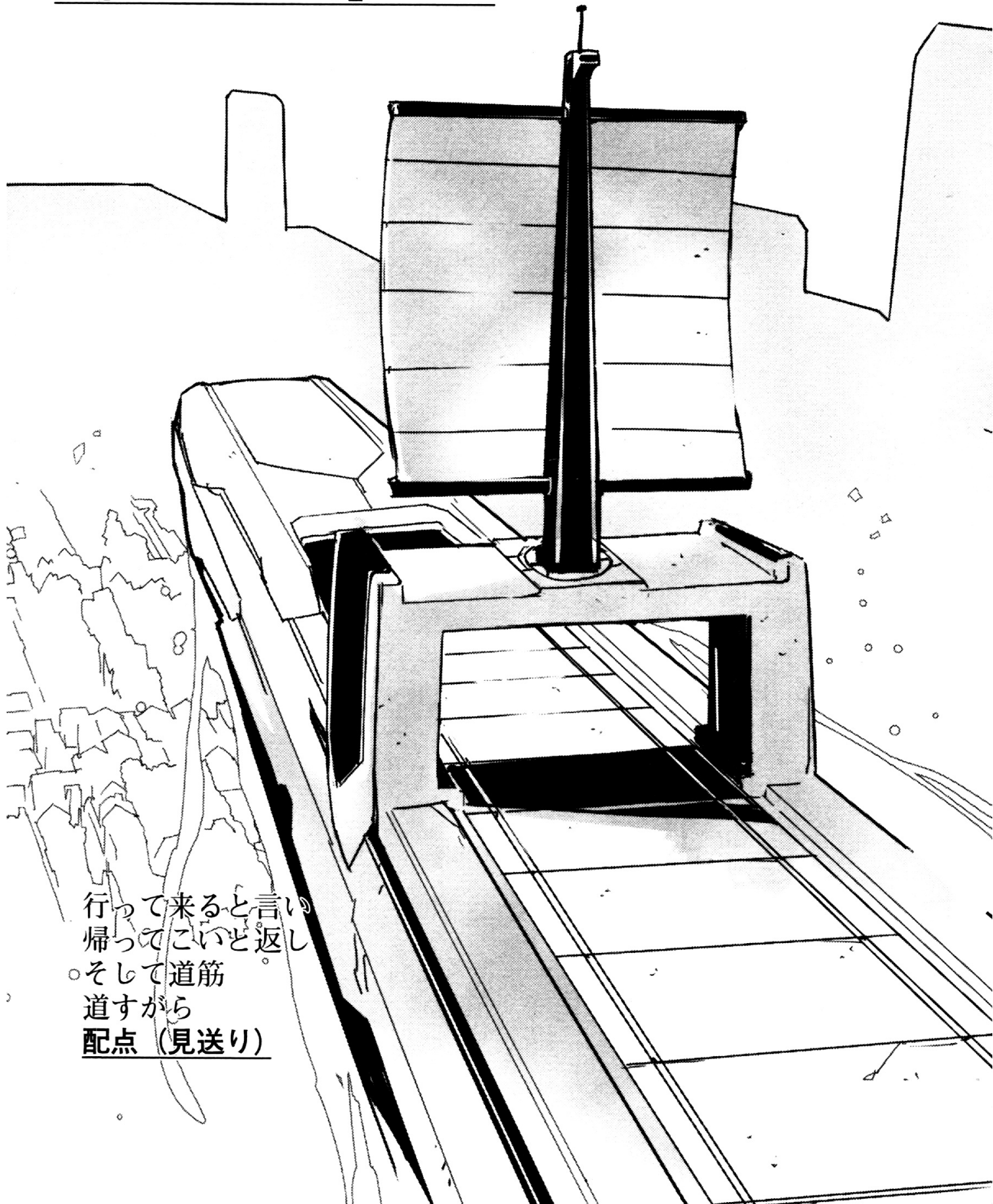
“You two figure it out.”

He walked into the spring. It was unexpectedly deep.

# **Chapter 17: Departure on a Ship**

# 第十七章

## 『船上の出立者』



行って来ると言い  
帰ってこいと返し  
。そして道筋  
道すがら  
配点（見送り）

*You say you will be going*

*They tell you to come on back*

*And with that*

*You are on your way*

### **Point Allocation (Seeing You Off)**

"Okay, you all take care of things here until I'm back."

With that, something was raised into the air.

It was a fist.

And it belonged to Noriki.

But it was not another fist that bumped into it.

It was a spread hand.

It belonged to Toori who spoke with a straight face.

"I win...!"

Horizon casually struck him with a karate chop from behind.

She ignored the idiot who cried out like a squawking chicken and she raised her right hand toward Noriki.

"We will be on our way to Houjou for some hyahah-ing, but you are leaving before then, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Judge. We may not have known each other long, but I am in your debt, Noriki-sama. Umm..."

Horizon fell silent there.

She also grew motionless.

They were up in the sky, on the transport ship's deck.

The eight ships of the Musashi spread out below them.

The transport ship was descending toward Okutama.

But Horizon sweated motionlessly as the wind blew by.

"..."

After a few seconds of this, Noriki felt an awkward sweat of his own.

"Hey," he said, but Horizon quickly held her right palm out.

"No hint please."

"Okay then..."

He heard Naito saying "You can't just accept it!", but there was no meaning in that.

Horizon used one arm to hold back the idiot who tried to grope her chest.

"...It happened the other day."

"Oh, you've remembered?"

"...Let us speak of a hypothetical situation." Sweat covered her expressionless face. "The other day in the plaza in the vicinity of my room in the underground area in Tama in..."

"Horizon!" said Mitotsudaira. "You're so shaken that you're saying 'in' an awful lot!"

"It is within the margin of error. An automaton could not possibly feel flustered-ered-ered-ered-ered."

**Mal-Ga:** "Then would you call this an impressive level of ability?"

**Flat Vassal:** "No, because Vicereine Horizon only has an automaton body."

"Calm down," said Horizon while checking a sign frame. "Anyway, Noriki-sama. And at that time, who was it I saw dragging around a roast squid stand? Why, it was-..."

"That would be me!" said a different boy.

"Yes, it was Ohiroshiki-sama. Good job not falling for the trick question."

"Are you okay?"

"I am indeed. ...Ah." Horizon adjusted her iron claw to hold the idiot down from above. "You set up our tent, didn't you?"

"So you remembered."

"Judge. My memory is excellent, so there was never anything to worry about. That concludes my mission concerning you. Have a good trip. Um, your destination is..."

Horizon stopped moving again, so Naomasa cut in.

"Su – wa. He's going to Suwa. And because boys never like doing things the easy way, he was planning to go there by land. Still, it's sure to be a once-in-a-lifetime event. ...So go do what you have to do."

"Judge." Noriki nodded and then looked at everyone around him. "The rest of you will be continuing the study camp in Okutama's nature district, right?"

"Judge. Even if this is a travel day, we want to avoid giving them any reason to find fault. The history recreation might take precedence over school events, but we need to do as much of it as we can," replied Masazumi. "Although we'll only be doing that until this evening. ...Still, we should arrive in Houjou in the afternoon and then we have our meeting with Mouri. We need to find out what Mouri is really after here."

And...

"I personally want to avoid a war if possible."

Everyone looked shocked.

**Gold Mar:** "Some things are just too far-fetched to believe..."

**Unturning:** "Should we pretend we didn't hear that?"

**Tachibana Wife:** "Don't be ridiculous, Date Vice Chancellor. The Musashi Vice President is suppressing her true desire here. We need to recognize her incredible resolve by fully supporting her."

**Marube-ya:** "Yes, yes, yes! This is the awful pressure I was waiting for!!"

**Vice President:** "I don't know what this is about, but you all need to learn how

to believe in people! I can't believe you people!"

**Almost Everyone:** "How about you take your own advice!?"

**Bell:** "Eh? Eh?"

**Asama:** "Umm, here, Suzu-san. I'll explain that horribly twisted logic for you."

"Wait," said Masazumi.

The Reine des Garous was with them here.

*...So we can't exactly talk about the meeting.*

But that woman was really blending in with them. That was obvious from the fact that Futayo was no longer focused on her.

If there was any hint of hostility at all, Futayo would have been by her side, but Futayo's gaze was fixed on another ship approaching theirs.

The approaching ship had gray armor and belonged to the engine division.

"Is Noriki taking that to Suwa?"

"That's right," said Naomasa. "Suwa is the land of a combat god. It's also where the engine division gets various ores for the Musashi. That's what the transport is officially being sent for." She nodded toward Noriki. "So don't hesitate to take it. And don't thank us. It's headed there on engine division business and you're just hitching a ride."

"Judge. ...I'll just assume I was lucky."

"Sure thing," said Naomasa with her teeth visible through the corners of her mouth.

"How rare," said Masazumi when she saw that.

"Huh? What is?"

"Oh, nothing."

By then Naomasa's smile had vanished.

But a sign frame appeared, limited to just the girls.

**Asama:** "Masa doesn't really like it when people thank her. She mostly doesn't react or gives a quick response. In some cases, she actually sounds annoyed."

**Smoking Girl:** "That's just how I am. You're used to it, aren't you?"

*True enough,* silently agreed Masazumi.

But Naomasa's behavior did not come from a dislike of other people. According to Suzu and Adele...

**Bell:** "Naomasa...-san is...happy when I...mend her clothes?"

**Flat Vassal:** "And she doesn't say a thing when you pass her a printout."

"Right?" said both Suzu and Adele while exchanging a glance. Naomasa responded by bringing her hand to her forehead.

The boys all tilted their heads, but this was a shared secret among the girls.

*...Oh, so I'm on the girls side...*

Masazumi belatedly realized that, although realizing it did not really mean anything. But to get back on topic...

**Vice President:** "I don't like having other people in my debt either."

Of course, she did not know how Naomasa really felt or how great a difference in magnitude there was between them. But Naomasa probably preferred the casualness of doing something that was "useful but does not require thanks" over something more major.

*That's the opposite of normal,* thought Masazumi.

Most people wanted to earn other people's gratitude and to show just how much of an influence they were on the other person.

*...No.*

*Only shallow people are like that,* she corrected herself.

If you engaged with other people only because you wanted to be something important for them, then you were reliant on them.

That was why Masazumi asked a question, while feeling like she had brought

the issue full circle.

"Noriki."

"What?"

She asked her question.

"It might be a bit late for this, but let me ask you something. ...Are you listening? Let's say you gain something while at Suwa and return to us with it. And let's say you face Houjou Ujinao in battle afterwards."

In that case...

"Do you intend to settle something for yourself?"

Masazumi was not sure if he would understand what her question meant.

*...Questions like this are tricky.*

But she needed to ask it.

After all, Noriki was a resident of Musashi.

He had a connection to Houjou and he was attempting to gain a decisive method for the battle against them.

*But,* thought Masazumi.

"You are a resident of Musashi. So am I. We all are."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Mary embrace Crossunite's arm. Naruze surreptitiously circled behind them with a Magie Figur open, but that was perfectly normal. *Don't look at me.*

But they would all know what this meant.

"Noriki, you are free to settle things with Houjou. If you can defeat one of our enemies, that would be a benefit for the nation of Musashi. But I would rather you did not see what you are doing as an important event for Houjou."

Listen.

"Do not view your actions as important to Houjou."

"Why not?"

"There are two reasons."

"Tw-...!"

Just as the idiot tried to shout "two" and lift up Horizon's breasts, he was hit and knocked into the air by a no-motion uppercut.

"Foolish brother! That was a nice aerial *boke*! You went so beautifully limp! I give you 9.7 artistic points!"

Was that how it worked? And shouldn't the points be awarded to Horizon instead?

Masazumi continued speaking while ignoring the idiot landing on the deck head-first "First, this is a war we are facing here, not an avenue for you to convey your feelings for Houjou."

And the other reason...

"Doing something important for Houjou...is for me to do."

**Azuma:** "Is she talking about declaring war?"

**Worshiper:** "You are surprisingly harsh, Azuma-kun!!"

**Novice:** "But can we really call it important when everyone is expecting it?"

**Vice President:** "Oh, shut up! I will declare war if it's necessary! I really will!"

*Masazumi-san is...so much more emotional...than she used to be*, thought Suzu.

She had not quite been silent in the past, but Suzu had thought she had a mature sort of quietness to her.

And that impression may not have been wrong.

**Bell:** "People really can...change."

**Scarred:** "Judge. That's right. People become what they earnestly hope to be."

**Mal-Ga:** "Yes, people get more and more infected..."

**Gold Mar:** "Ga-chan, that has a bit of a different nuance to it."

Suzu had to agree.

At any rate, she thought it was a good thing if people changed in a good way, but also good if there were parts that did not change.

Everyone would have their own way of changing.

Some people would whittle away parts of themselves and others would add more onto themselves. It sounded like she was talking about chest size, but that was not what she meant.

And now...

*...Noriki-kun is changing too.*

No, he had changed before this too. During middle school, he had been so busy with part-time work to support his family that he had barely been sociable at all.

But after entering high school, he had been more sociable and had fought on the front line since Mikawa.

He claimed that was because his younger siblings had grown enough to reduce the burden on the family, but...

*...He let his socialization with us fill the opening that created.*

Did that count as changing or going back to the way he was?

Suzu did not know.

But she knew what change he was trying to obtain now.

"Are you going...to save...Ujinao-san?"

Noriki turned toward her.

He briefly opened his mouth and started to say something, but then...

"I'm not that conceited," he said. "Also, this is a process. The process of me 'earnestly hoping' to be something."

"Judge." Toori nodded, placed a hand on Noriki's shoulder, and stood

alongside him. "...This is a process. The process of me 'earnestly hoping' to be something."

"Hey, I didn't put that dramatic pause at the start."

Suzu very much agreed.

Neshinbara was saying something about "But that's what makes it so great!", but she did not really understand.

Regardless, Noriki's shoulders relaxed and he lightly tapped on Toori's side.

"I'll be going."

"Come on back."

"Judge," he replied with a nod.

Just then, they heard a voice from the engine division transport ship approaching theirs.

"Heyyy! I was hoping to leave soon! Is that okay!?"

Suzu had not heard this voice in a while. It belonged to...

*...Mishina Hiro-chan?*

Naomasa viewed the large sign frame opened on the engine division transport ship.

In the usual engine division style, the contrast and brightness were turned up and it displayed an enlarged image of Hiro who stood below it.

"Hiro, will you be his guide?"

"Judge! I sometimes visited Suwa to procure some parts back when I was in Qing-Takeda! I'll be the one to gather and prepare the cargo!"

*That was a good choice,* thought Naomasa.

Hiro had a connection to the Ariake and that connection would make her an honored guest. If she was guiding Noriki, their transport ship would be protected by Suwa.

*...Also...*

Musashi would begin a battle the following day.

**Novice:** "If they can leave now and be back tomorrow, we will essentially receive some supplies during the Houjou battle. Odawara Castle is ground-based, so it will primarily be a ground battle, but it is still possible the Musashi itself will take damage. ...If we will have some supplies arriving from outside, we can reduce the Musashi's weight, so this is nothing but a plus for us."

**347:** "That's why I've loaded the transport ship with old armor panels meant for the old Musashi. They're too heavy for the current Musashi Mk. 2 and the ether pathways aren't up to our current standards, so I plan to trade them for other parts at Suwa."

**Almost Everyone:** "This girl knows what she's doing!"

"No, no," said Hiro with a dismissive wave of her hands.

But Heidi averted her gaze and spoke quietly.

"Thanks to that, the armor panels we stocked up on are going to be useless..."

"Huh?" said Naomasa. "We buy our armor panels from IZUMO, so the Marube-ya has nothing to do with that."

"No, no. These are for VIPs' personal ships. We put a lot of effort into that this time around, but then your engine division goes and buys up a whole bunch of them. We couldn't jack up the prices after that, so Shiro-kun is back to earning a bit of money with vegetable sales."

"Maybe Shirojiro-dono should just stick to selling vegetables from now on."

"Not to worry, not to worry. We've found another deal that will pay off at an even better rate. We'll have ten times the money by tomorrow."

"That sounds extremely risky!"

The ship arrived while they all provided that *tsukkomi* together.

The other deck approached and...

"Whaaam!"

The ship came alongside theirs more forcefully than expected.

Hiro's voiced sound effect came from a little lower down. The people

boarding her transport ship's deck were likely meant to jump to it.

Several sign frames appeared between the ships to buffer them. They absorbed the impact and noise before breaking. It was a simple buffering method, so it did not fully eliminate the bounce-back and the ships would soon drift apart again.

Their transport ship slid a bit, as if pulling their legs out from under them. And while that happened...

"Okay, I'm off."

Noriki jumped to the engine division transport ship with a sack of luggage on his back.

Naomasa watched him go and saw that everyone else was doing the same.

*...I really have gotten more relaxed.*

Several years ago, she would not have watched him go like this.

Since he would be back, she would not have bothered. And if he had never returned, it would not have really bothered her either. That left her with no real reason to watch him go. It was like a mere ceremony. She would have preferred to spend that time on something more useful.

That was how she used to be.

But what about now?

"..."

She breathed in.

They were approaching a battle.

*...And they say the Genbu showed up in Hexagone Française.*

As the Suzaku's owner, she had to wonder how that would turn out. Meanwhile, Masazumi spoke up behind her.

"Okay, everyone. We need to complete the rest of our study camp at Okutama while planning for tomorrow and beyond. I will-..."

"Testament. This afternoon, Terumoto will prepare a ship for the meeting and

arrive with the Houjou Representative."

Those were the Reine des Garous's words. It was Asama who responded.  
She looked back in surprise.

"She will be preparing a ship for the meeting?"

Naomasa understood why Asama was in such a hurry to question that.

Naomasa turned toward the Reine des Garous and asked a question.

"Between that meeting ship and the Musashi, which do you think would have greater divine transmission security? The Musashi would clearly be safer."

"You want Houjou and Mouri to hold a 'closed-room meeting with strict security' with our supposed enemies at Musashi? The Testament Union would take issue with that."

She had a point.

Masazumi nodded and turned to face Asama.

"Judge. Asama, sorry, but can you handle the divine transmission support and record-keeping?"

"Understood. I think I will set myself up as a mobile shrine."

Horizon nodded and Toori responded too.

"Seijun, you take care of the meeting. This sounds like it's going to be about some big stuff. ...I can see why they felt they had to send Nate Maman in first."

"...My king, don't say that while looking at my mother's chest."

But while they said that, a silhouette moved through the sky.

The engine division transport ship was slowly ascending.

The large sign frame open on their side of the ship showed Hiro waving and someone else behind her: ...*Noriki is finally on the move.*

"This sounds like it will be exciting," said Naomasa.

She also knew they were going to be busy with the battle beginning the

following day.

"I know you're busy, but we need to head out with Weiss Fürstin and Schwarz Fürstin right away! Our IDs are Hashiba-10-03 and Hashiba-10-04, our route is to eastern Houjou, and our objective is arrival and observation!"

The cold wind blew through the sky.

Two masses of metal whipped up clouds of fog on a hardened wood runway floating there.

They were Katou Yoshiaki's Weiss Fürstin and Wakisaka Angie's Schwarz Fürstin.

They were already seated in the upright position and they ignored the ether light escaping from gaps in the metal panels.

"Kanitama!"

"Y-yes!"

Wakisaka spoke to Kani who stood to her left.

"This is Sakuma's aerial ship, but it plans to arrive near the combat area. You come to Houjou after us, observe the state of things there, and use that to decide whether or not you will join the battle."

With that, Wakisaka grabbed a charm and spread it to the left and right.

She placed the charm over her eyes without waiting for it to gradually grow transparent and become something like sunglasses. She then asked Kani a question.

"Kanitama, are you nervous!?"

The intensity of the ether light, noise, and wind threatened to drown out their voices, so they naturally found themselves shouting a lot. Kani gave a firm nod.

"This is my first time on an aerial ship like this! And an aircraft carrier at that!"

"I imagine so! This thing launches the P.A. Oda cooking team on the battlefield!"

"The cooking team!? Why!?"

"Testament! Long ago, a Persian sultan found a chef's cooking so disgusting that he sent him to the battlefield with an anchor pile, but the chef did surprisingly well. Ever since, they've sent the cooking team in first...except none of that is true, okay!? Did you believe me!? Kanitama, you don't seem like you can recognize a joke, so are you okay!?"

"Angie! If you're going to make a joke, you can't start feeling sorry for her and give up partway through!"

"Then what do they launch from here!?" asked Kani. "The track team like Tres España!?"

"The tea ceremony club," said Yoshiaki.

"Th-that's just another joke, right!? Right!?"

"If you think so, then look down at the catapult lane's sole hook. It's shaped like the *setta* that Sen no Rikyu invented."

Kani looked down and saw the mechanism that locked onto the feet of the person being launched by the catapult. When she looked carefully at the shape...

"...W-wait, this isn't a *setta*. It's just a flat panel!"

"..."

"Wh-why aren't you saying anything!?"

But while she said that, *lernen figurs* lined up along the deck.

They were takeoff instructions.

The two Technohexen adjusted the charms in front of their eyes.

The transparent charms weakened the sunlight. And then the Schwarz Hexen spoke.

"Okay, Kanitama. Will you be able to catch up with us?"

"Oh, testament! Sorry about all the trouble!"

"You were light and you didn't move, so it was no trouble."

“Yes, the sky was so pretty! I was like ‘wow’ and then there it was!”

“I see,” said Yoshiaki with a nod.

She saw the instruction to move from the apron to the runway.

“Sounds like we can actually throw on some speed next time you ride with us.”

“Eh!? You can go even faster than that!?”

“Kanitama...”

“Ah! Wh-what is that pitying look for!?”

“In that case.” Wakisaka suddenly put on a full-faced smile. “Kanitamaaa~!”

“Celebrating for no reason is just confusing!”

**Kuro Take:** “Um, stop that. Don’t tease Kani-kun so much.”

**AnG:** “Yeah, but she’s like our first underclassman. ...Although I guess we’re really just doing the same stuff we do to Kacky.”

□□凸: “Th-that really hurts, you know!? And what you’ve done to me is far worse, so let’s just end the discussion here!”

**6:** “Why are you getting jealous?”

□□凸: “That’s the kind of thing I was afraid of...!”

“Come to think of it, Shouroku is the youngest one of us all,” muttered Wakisaka before turning to face Kani again. “Okay, we need to get going! And I’ll give you a nice piece of info first.”

“Eh!? What is it!?”

“Well,” said Wakisaka as she stepped from the apron to the runway.

She lined up alongside Yoshiaki and slid Schwarz Fürstin into the air as she continued.

“This aircraft carrier launches the sword fighting club. ...It was originally developed for Tres España, but M.H.R.R Chancellor Charles V was their Chancellor too, right? It was meant for mechanical phoenixes, but it was remade for mobile shells and sent to M.H.R.R. instead.”

“And thanks to that, it’s now a useful aircraft carrier that can launch Technohexen too.”

“Right?”

With that, the Schwarz Hexen and Weiss Hexen stepped out onto the runway proper.

They were going to take off.

They had no cargo and they were to fly full speed toward Houjou in the southeast.

Yoshiaki took a breath at the stern of the aircraft carrier.

They sometimes used this aircraft carrier to resupply. It flew at more than twice Zwei Fürstin’s standard cruising altitude, so it could be a pain to reach.

*...But the thrill of being launched from the catapult and the view from this altitude are both so wonderful.*

Sakuma appeared on a *lernen figur* in the air. The small figure wore an M.H.R.R. girl’s uniform.

“Sakuma, thanks for your hard work at Novgorod.”

“Sure, sure. I’m ashamed I couldn’t keep things up as ‘Retreating Sakuma’ until you got there.”

**AnG:** “Surviving the sinking of your ship is pretty impressive, don’t you think?”

**Kimee:** “Everyone judges themselves by different standards, Angie.”

But she had something to ask.

“Sakuma, will you be coming too?”

“That depends on the situation, but probably not. Yeah, I really doubt it. I might support you though. Want some candy?”

“Testament,” said Yoshiaki with a nod as she placed her hand on Weiss Fürstin’s control flap.

She fixed the flap in its usual position. The show only truly started once she

felt the metal clicking into place.

“Weiss Fürstin is prepared for standard cruising.”

The pressure of her fingers moved the rear vector nozzle and the pressure on the rest behind her thighs opened and closed the nozzle.

Next to her, Angie went through a quick check on a Magie Figur.

“Okay. Both crafts are currently on the deck of the Sakuma Fleet’s Narumi Castle aircraft carrier. Any higher priority flights?’

“No, no,” said Sakuma. “The captain herself is controlling your flight, so I hope you’re thankful. It’s just cause I’m bored, though. Oh, but a supply ship will be rising off of starboard, so don’t break to the right.”

“Testament. Course confirmed. ...Releasing spell choke clip!”

Behind them, the Magie Figur that had been holding them in place shattered into light.

Immediately, light filled the rear thrusters.

*...It’s so different when we have a ship supplying us with power.*

This was not just a warship. It was an aircraft carrier that specialized in aerial forces. Even on the Azuchi Castle, they had to take off and land under their own power, so a specialized aircraft carrier really was different.

“If only this could come with us to Houjou.”

“We need to place our hopes elsewhere, Kime-chan.”

“Testament,” agreed Yoshiaki while Sakuma reached for the controls outside of the *lernen figur* screen.

“Activating two of the spell catapults. Beginning Eastern European Technomagic conversion of Holy Spell. Zwei Eisen, connect your rear clutch to the catapult hook.”

“Testament. Zwei Eisen has confirmed Zwei Fürstin’s anti-air anti-surface same-level interception equipment. Weiss Fürstin includes extra compression equipment and Schwarz Fürstin includes extra reduction equipment. Requesting authorization for emergency combat usage near your ship.”

“Testament,” was the reply. “That’s fine, I guess. And keep up that energy level. ...Oh, I have confirmation of launch weight. You check on your end.”

Their weight appeared on a *lernen figur*.

“Huh...?” said Angie. “I’m heavier now?”

“You were carrying my luggage on the way here. Because I was carrying Kani.”

“Hiii!” shouted Kani while waving at them. She apparently intended to watch them take off.

*Well, fine. That’s a “testament” for the weight confirmation.* They pressed the sign button on the *lernen figur*. And...

“Good, good,” said Sakuma. “This is a pain, so I’m just raising the catapult hooks now.”

On the panel below Yoshiaki’s feet, an anchor rose up behind her to support her legs from the heel to the back of the knee.

Similarly, a *lernen figur* appeared behind Weiss Fürstin such that it stuck into the device a little.

That was to hold it in place. Weiss Fürstin was lightly fixed in place while the trembling noise from the rear acceleration system grew louder.

“Now that’s a nice sound!”

Angie shouted over the noise as a new light appeared below their feet.

They were Magie Figurs. This was an anti-G cradle created by converting a Holy Spell into Technomagie. It surrounded both Weiss Fürstin and Schwarz Fürstin.

“The anti-G spell cradle has opened. Our bodies are fixed in place. The bows are fixed in place.”

With the sound of a watch crown turning, the cradle split into a top and bottom version. Then each one adjusted its position to measure the cardinal directions.

And as soon as that was complete...

*...The final preparation.*

“Control! Raise the blast deflector!”

With that, a metal panel stood up behind Zwei Fürstin. A Holy Spell acceleration spell was written on that acceleration light reflector panel. But it was set counterclockwise, upside-down, and in reverse.

It had been built on opposites for Technohexen use.

So Yoshiaki nodded. She exchanged a glance with Angie by her side and they spoke in unison.

“Zwei Eisen, full power.”

The noise and light passed by them from back to front.

They could not move forward because their devices were fixed in place.

So they did not fear to squeeze the control flaps.

“Weiss Fürstin, full power, all green!”

“Schwarz Fürstin, full power, all green!”

That received a response from Sakuma.

“Okay, okay. Zwei Eisen, you have authorization to take off!! ...Launching spell catapults!”

The deck beneath them raced forward with enough force that they passed by their acceleration light.

They had been launched.

*...Ohh.*

Angie felt like the front of her craft had been tugged forward.

The catapult gave them a speed of 300kph. That was 93m/s.

It was not enough to reach Zwei Fürstin’s max speed, but the catapult got them up to speed more quickly.

The flight deck was about 300m long, so they would clear it in 4 seconds at their current speed.

They were moving so fast.

This speed used to scare her.

After all, the catapult structure meant the acceleration came from below their feet first. It made her feel like she was going to fall onto her butt. So she used to lean forward, cling to Schwarz Fürstin and let the catapult do all the work.

But no longer.

There was a spell cradle behind her. When she knew that field was supporting her body, there were things she could do in that short period of time.

She could not just cling to Schwarz Fürstin.

She had to hold it and pull it close. She had to use that action to squeeze the control flaps.

“Accelerate...!”

There was something she wanted to do: surpass the catapult’s acceleration over these 300 meters.

She adjusted Schwarz Fürstin’s acceleration settings to focus on initial speed.

“Go...!”

She gained powerful speed. She felt the wind.

There was something here she could not find when flying in the sky: the deck.

Even when they flew at speeds rivalling the catapult’s, this floor was not there.

Was this what it would feel like to fly along the surface?

The lift produced by the deck, the craft, and her own wings felt like it was going to send everything up and away. But the buffer fixation spell kept them on the catapult.

There was only one type of movement allowed before reaching the end of the deck.

*...Accelerating forward!*

To avoid accidents, the fixation did not prevent forward movement.

So Angie accelerated.

Schwarz Technomagie worked through reduction. For acceleration, she used repulsion gravity to move through the sky.

“Kh...!”

The end of the deck was only a breath away.

It was so short.

It would be so much different with another 100 meters.

*...The Null Vier must be nice!*

On Musashi, the Technohexen liked to play a game similar to this. In recorded footage and from a distance, she had seen Technohexen setting up buoys across a 400 meter space of sky and holding an acceleration competition through them.

Musashi’s Zwei Fräulein had trained themselves in that environment. So...

“We have to do it in 300...!”

She squeezed out as much acceleration as possible.

The wind blew past and the noise thinned out.

“———”

The deck ended.

“Wow...!”

Kani covered her ears because of the two loud noises ringing across the deck.

Sakuma spoke to her from the cross-shaped control bridge standing up from the side of the deck.

“Hey, hey, new girl. Did you see that?”

“Oh, yes! I did!”

“I see, I see. Then make sure you remember it.”

Sakuma watched the thin lines racing into the southeastern sky.

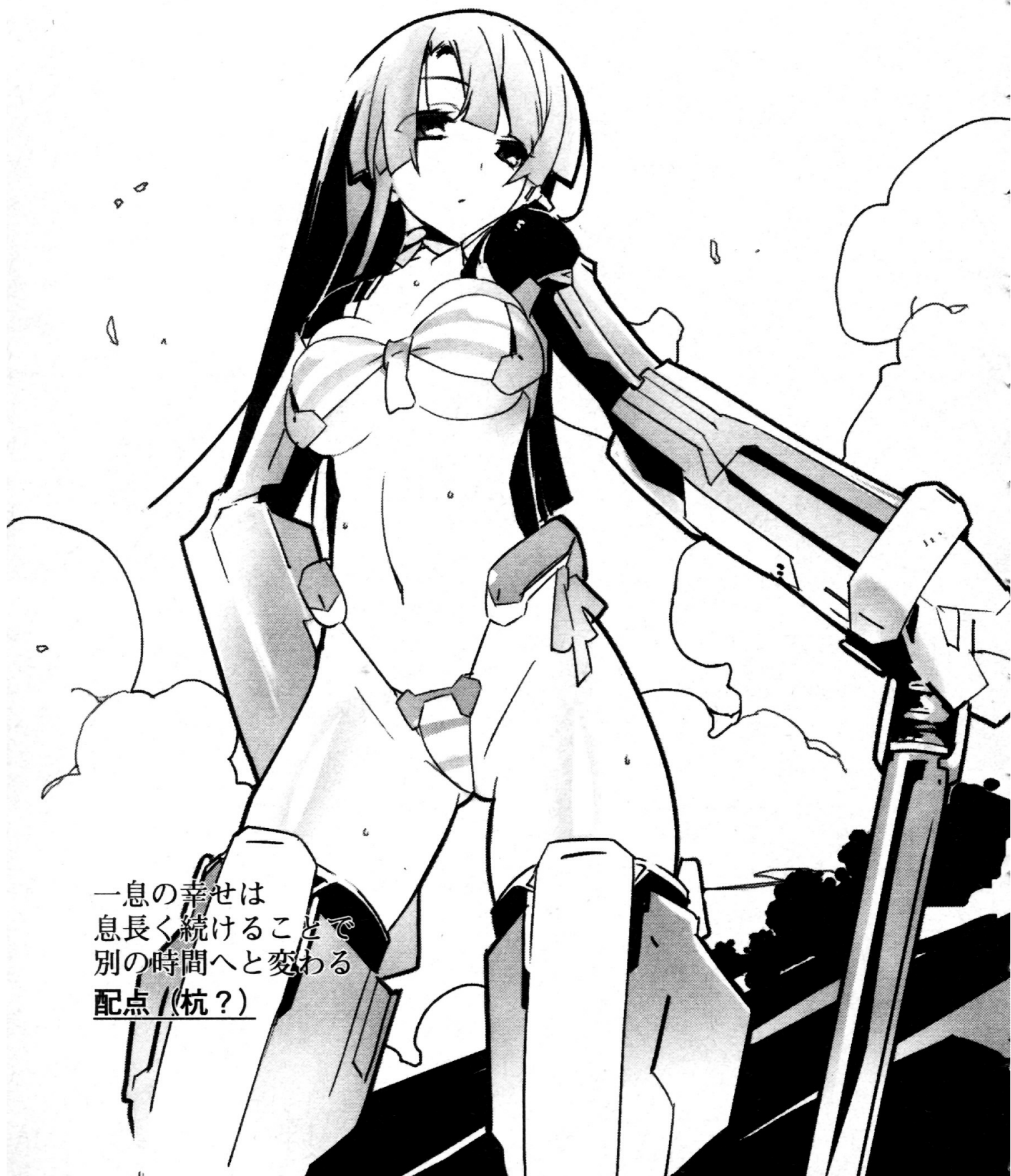
“While they didn’t completely pull it off, they broke the sound barrier under their own power before reaching the head of the deck. ...Even in the Technohexen Null Vier, you don’t often see the sound barrier broken before 400m.”

# **Chapter 18: Eaters on the Riverside**

## 第十八章

### 『川辺の喰い屋さん』

一息の幸せは  
息長く続けることで  
別の時間へと変わる  
配点 / (杭?)



*A happy breather*

*Lasts the span of a breath*

*So it changes into something else*

### **Point Allocation (A stake?)**

Masazumi took a breath below the blue sky.

She was in a park within the Okutama nature district near the academy.

The forest surrounded a small clearing that contained a meeting room known as the Residence of the Deceased.

She sat on a wooden bench and the atmosphere was quiet with the exception of the playing children brought here by their parents.

*...I sometimes come here to read.*

She could relax here because it had no connection to school or to herself.

The transport ships in the sky told her she was back on the Musashi, but this park still felt like it was away from home. After all, those awful classmates of hers were nowhere to be seen or heard.

Being able to relax and enjoy the feeling of being an outsider may have been nice. But...

"I should have asked Crossunit to collect this paperwork from the academy."

The others were all in this Okutama nature district. They were setting up a tent for their luggage and finishing up the rest of the study camp.

They were probably still on their morning work.

*...I thought this would just be playing in the water, but there's a surprising amount to do.*

Oriotorai had instructed them to clean up the nature district.

The girls were in the artificial river doing laundry and maintenance while the boys were in the forest for pruning and cleaning.

As a school event, the study camp doubled as a way to provide a public

service.

**Novice:** "...After putting this much effort into the work, we can insist we were doing our study camp even if Crossdressing Honda-kun can't stop talking about war."

**Tachibana Husband:** "Gin, should I help you with the laundry like usual?"

**Tachibana Wife:** "Master Muneshige, you're making me sound like a failure of a wife..."

**Tachibana Husband:** "Oh, sorry. I only ever help with hanging it up to dry. Because I can reach higher."

**Gold Mar:** "...How loving."

**Mal-Ga:** "Yes, it makes me want to egg them on..."

Masazumi saw that sort of thing beginning as she began her own work.

*...I have to prepare for the meeting this afternoon.*

She had previously held a meeting with Hexagone Française and Houjou at IZUMO and Magdeburg. Tsukinowa managed those records, but she had only given him the bare minimum to take along on their study camp.

Just in case, there was a console in the student council room that could be accessed for important matters, but...

"I probably set things up too strictly because I'm a beginner at this kind of thing."

Once she was used to it, she would probably be able to set things up to be called in remotely.

*...It might be best to have Asama set these things up.*

Speaking of Asama, she had been acting weird earlier.

Well, Masazumi's classmates were always acting weird, but...

*...She was fixing lunch and doing Aoi and Horizon's laundry so quickly...*

And yet she had seemed a bit blunt overall. When Masazumi, Horizon, or anyone else offered to help, she would only stammer "Oh, um, yes" and flee.

She clearly had something on her mind, but...

*...I just hope it isn't some weird brain disease.*

Masazumi felt justified in worrying about that here. But...

"...Ah."

She heard a voice in the distance.

It was a song: the Song of Passage.

Horizon was probably the one singing. Masazumi's mother had sung it to her as a lullaby and she remembered singing along with it. So...

"Let me pass."

She breathed in when she heard it.

It was time to go.

This was no time to be taking a breather.

Everyone was working, even if just for the study camp, so she had to as well.

*...It's comfortable here, but this is no time to be basking in that atmosphere.*

She felt like her mother was pushing her onward as she stood up.

She looked to the Residence of the Deceased meeting room that was shaped like a hexagon from above.

"If Houjou wasn't preparing a ship, this might have been a good place for the meeting."

With that, she began walking. First to Remorse Way. That would take her close to the nature district river the others were at.

*The river smells different,* thought Narumi.

The Okutama nature district was in between the Asama Shrine and the academy.

Some of the girls seemed familiar with the area, so the Schwarz Hexen spoke from the open riverside.

"That rock over there would work as a washboard. ...Oh, and I'm not talking about Mito-tsan."

"I-I feel like we had this exact conversation last time we were here!"

They all still had plenty of energy.

They cheerfully did the laundry and prepared for lunch. Narumi was working with Tachibana Gin and 6th Special Duty Officer Naomasa to perform maintenance on the river's inner blocks.

It was a simple task. While the nature district's river had rocks, it was primarily made from a series of blocks. So they had to remove, clean, and reattach the purification blocks and stream management blocks on the bottom and sides. It was the same thing over and over, but...

*...There's so much to learn.*

For example...

"I see Musashi's stacked structure allows you to replace pieces from above or the sides. Is everything fully replaceable because you secure durability by the block?"

That showed just how flexible Musashi's design was, but it also showed it had not been designed for combat.

Tachibana Gin nodded while working alongside her.

"If the structure allows removal and attachment from the top or sides, then the armor must be weaker in those places. During the Armada battle, they avoided damage with water barriers and transport ships, but they would be in trouble if those areas were hit by the light bullets that Houjou used the other day."

It was possible they would have to fight Houjou the following day.

Narumi hoped they could avoid a fleet battle. The Musashi had stronger defenses than most ships, but that was almost entirely reliant on the automaton-controlled defense barriers.

*...But our new tactics and new weapons have brought us to a point where those defense barriers and high-speed abilities just aren't enough.*

Something about her thoughts amused her.

*...I've really started to side with Musashi, haven't I?*

She had not even been here a full month yet, but the fact that she lived here made her aware this was her home.

The academy in particular made it feel different from a trip or a job.

The textbooks, curriculum, and class structure were all different from her old home. It had all seemed strange at first, but once she grasped their purpose and how they worked, she had quickly grown accustomed to them. After all, to understand those things was to understand her new home.

She did wonder if this was a form of brainwashing, but she appreciated that the people around her were just the right amount of crazy.

That allowed her to believe it was all natural and just the way of things, not anything calculated.

And there was of course no reason to hold onto that doubt when she lived with someone who was undoubtedly a complete idiot.

"What is it, Date Vice Chancellor?" asked Tachibana Gin.

But Narumi was unsure what the question meant.

"What is what?"

"Hee hee. Your face is red," said the Reine des Garous from the other side. She had rearranged the large stones on the riverside as if to create a garden and she was now admiring her handiwork. "Your boyfriend complimented your swimsuit earlier, didn't he?"

"It's a real shame. This was the only thing available at the store I went to."

It was a pain how the woman said "my, my" with a bitter smile. Narumi had her own work to do.

Those various issues with the idiot half-dragon would continue as long as they lived together. She had no right to find fault here. What mattered was that they made preparations for life and then lived that life. So...

"Maintenance here helps manage the Asama Shrine's water quality, doesn't

it?"

"Judge. This water passes through the purification tank below the Asama Shrine and it is used as an ether fuel catalyst and in the ether pathways. What we are doing here is limited to the water flowing on the surface, but maintaining things upstream seems meaningful to me."

"The underground portion is our duty in the engine division," said Naomasa. "The surface area is supposed to be managed by the Musashi, but the automatons have been busy lately."

"I am glad to hear all that."

This was more than just cleaning. With that in mind, Narumi reached for a seam at the bottom of the water.

Similarly, Tachibana Gin stuck her hand in a seam 5m downstream.

They looked up at each other.

"Okay, let's remove this one. ...Asama Shrine Representative! You can stop controlling the water flowing into the Asama Shrine after this block, okay?"

Asama prepared for lunch while speaking with Narumi.

She normally had Horizon and the others' help, but she was only doing it with Kimi today. Most of the preparations were complete, so it was time to divide the cold vegetables and meats into individual servings for everyone.

Even Kimi took things seriously when at a cutting board. It may have had to do with her sense of balance, but her movements were light and yet the blade moved swiftly through what it needed to cut.

Asama preferred to go slow and steady with this kind of thing, so Kimi was making faster progress.

She would sometimes find an extra fruit and then quickly peel and shape it with her knife.

"Look, look! It's Mitotsudaira's hair!"

"Who is going to eat that!?"

"Don't worry. I'll slice it up and put it in the salad."

Mitotsudaira was holding up and glaring at her own hair, but Asama pretended not to see it.

Horizon walked up from behind with sliced daikon radish.

"Asama-sama. I cut them all to the same size as requested."

"You didn't have to be that precise...but thank you."

"It was nothing," insisted Horizon while Naito and Naruze approached with a basket of sliced bread. They were both wearing swimsuits.

"Is there a stove we can use?"

"We've cooled off a fair bit after getting out of the water and doing some work."

"Yes, yes. The one on the right is open. I can give you towels if you need them."

"Judge." Naito raised her right hand and looked to Asama. "A new swimsuit?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. It's a Shirasago prototype."



It was a two-piece Shinto outfit and it was technically not a swimsuit.

"This is actually a support guard meant to be worn below your equipment. The one I wore at Sanada was a general-use one and this is a special-use one."

The swimsuit was primarily made from rectangular parts and they had the Shinto colors of white and red. But...

"Asama-chi, don't those look like Shinto charms?"

"Yes, but that's a good thing. The cloth portion acts as a pocket and you can store actual charms in them. ...That lets you swap out the charms for general defensive capabilities."

"In other words...it comes awfully close to being a bandaid swimsuit."

"I have no idea what that means and I think I would rather not know. ...Anyway, the data taken from this will provide feedback for future equipment."

Hearing that, Adele raised her right hand while doing laundry in the river.

"Won't that mean all the products are made for giant breasts?"

"I seriously doubt it..."

Asama continued cooking during that exchange.

*...Cooking outside makes for a nice breather.*

Once steam and noise began rising from the pot on the stove next to her, everyone returned to the riverside after getting to a stopping point in their work.

After finishing the laundry, Adele and Suzu returned to the river to play.

Mitotsudaira's mother, who had been moving large stones and such to prepare for the block maintenance, joined the others who left the river. Asama thought she might be sunbathing, but the woman put on a shirt made from the top of an inner suit.

"Oh, dear. Is that chicken leftover from last night? My daughter was eating it, if I recall."

"Eh? Oh, yes. I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but I kind of want to use it

all up here.”

“Heh heh. I can help then. Oh, and I mean help eat it.”

There was no chance of any leftovers now.

Next, the boys returned from the forest.

They had all been tending to the forest.

They were removing fallen trees, chopping down unneeded branches, and looking after the road. It was common work, but it helped reduce the Musashi's weight and revealed or prevented traps in the forest like the ones Sanada's Isa had set up before.

This work had been neglected during the remodeling in the Ariake.

So they were doing it now.

Their underclassmen had apparently done the other regions while they were gone on the study camp. This nature district had been left to them because it was directly connected to the Asama Shrine.

The boys were surprisingly filthy.

“Hey, we're back.”

“Heh heh. Foolish Brother? You're all filthy, so go wash off in the river.”

“Judge, judge. Okay, everyone, let's do that!”

Mitotsudaira's mother smiled a little when she saw them running into the river.

“My, my. So much energy. ...Is this scene visible from outside?”

“No. I've set up a transparent stealth and defense barrier around this area. Although the defense will only sound an alarm and capture any outsiders who try to get in.”

“That is plenty. It gives me some time to spend with Musashi's main force, and...”

She looked down at the sign frame opened by Asama's hands.

“You all need to prepare for tomorrow and beyond, don't you? You can't have

anyone spying on that.”

The Reine des Garous gave a few mental nods of understanding.

She sat on a stone she had set down and she viewed the group as a whole.

The boys had held a simple strategy meeting in the forest. It had been a lot like chatting while picking up branches and raising fallen trees.

“What do we do about any gods of war that show up tomorrow?”

“That would depend on the scope and type of unit. If it’s a small number of individual gods of war...”

They then compared the information they already had prepared on sign frames. With the girls, the Technohexen had used Magie Figurs to exchange cannon control and acceleration control settings while slicing bread and the Tachibana daughter had lifted up the control blocks to test out her new prosthetic arms.

This was not an official training ground, so it was fascinating to see how that sense of combat entered the everyday atmosphere.

This should have been their time off, but their work had permeated it.

*...For example...*

The Reine des Garous turned toward the Asama Shrine Representative. The girl was wearing a swimsuit and no special equipment, but...

*...She still immediately set up a stealth barrier on this scale.*

She was operating a few different sign frames, but that was presumably because this was something of a test for her.

She was testing herself too. She was seeing what she could do.

And as the Reine des Garous watched her...

“Eh? ...Oh, um...”

Their eyes met, the girl looked shocked, and then she looked to the dancer next to her.

She probably thought it had been a mistake to let an enemy nation know what she could do. But the dancer lightly raised her right hand which held a knife.

“Don’t worry about it, Asama. Letting them know will just intimidate them a little.”

“Right, right,” replied their king who was pouring water over his head in the river. He stripped off his work vest as he spoke. “Nate Maman, Asama can do more than just that. She has another job that’s way more important than setting up barriers.”

“...Her gunner job, you mean?”

Hearing that, the Asama Shrine Representative spread her mouth horizontally and tried to force a smile, but there was only one thing for the Reine des Garous to say.

“I’ve seen the records and your combat results are outstanding.”

“Eh? Umm, well, yes, how should I put this?”

“I think you must be one of the Far East’s greatest archers. ...Where did you learn those skills?”

“Eh? From my daily research maybe? Or maybe from the mood on the battlefield? Umm...”

Everyone began whispering.

“...Ga-chan? Is this the first time someone has judged Asama-chi so seriously?”

“...I think so. And since she’s having trouble responding, she must see herself as an oddity just like the rest of us do.”

The Far East was apparently a strict place.

But something else had her interest.

She had spoken with them about a lot of things the night before, but her daughter’s king had not been there then.

She thought back to that discussion as she asked a question.

“What is it the Asama Shrine Representative can do?”

Her question contained a hidden meaning.

There was more than one answer for this.

For example, managing that king’s ether supply spell and making Shinto spell arrangements were both possible answers.

And that may have been why the Reine des Garous saw the girl stop moving and look down at her hands.

Behind her, Musashi’s princess mimed rolling up her sleeves toward their king, so she may have been prepared to immediately respond if he answered incorrectly.

But the king showed off his teeth with a smile.

“All sorts of things in everyday life. That’s a shared secret between Asama and me.”

The Reine des Garous smiled at that answer.

She placed a hand on her cheek and asked just to be sure.

“My, really?”

“Yeah,” he immediately replied. “She’s always done all sorts of things. Like laundry, cooking, and getting me released from the guard stations. She also complains about my behavior and other things I can’t ask other people to do.”

A solid sound rang out.

The Asama Shrine Representative had slammed the knife against the cutting board.

She had tried to cut through some vegetables and used too much strength.

She made an odd noise and gathered up the scattered vegetables.

“Asama, are you okay?” asked the dancer with a bitter smile.

The girl stopped her frantic movements and blushed.

“Oh, I just can’t believe this. I can’t believe it at all...”

She did not say what she could not believe, but she somewhat wrinkled her brow and then closed her eyes.

“Well, how should I put this? Those things are important to me too.”

“Really? It’s a huge relief to hear you say that.”

Hearing that, the Asama Shrine Representative nodded a few times while oblivious to the double thumbs up from the princess behind her.

Then she took another breath and resumed chopping vegetables, but her movements were much more mechanical now.

That must have taken a lot of courage for her. And she seemed to be belatedly wondering if she had said the right thing or not.

“————”

Heat gradually filled her face and her head gradually lowered.

In response, Musashi’s Princess expressionlessly nodded.

“To be honest, there is a lot that would not function or that would go too far without Asama-sama. Similarly, there are things which would not be protected without Mitotsudaira-sama and things we could not get away with without Masazumi-sama or Futayo-sama. And without Tenzou-sama...no, that is a different matter.”

“Wh-what is that supposed to mean!?” protested the ninja.

“Hee hee. Master Tenzou, she is saying the things you do for everyone are too many to list.”

“That is quite the positive interpretation...” said everyone as Musashi’s Princess nodded.

“We can discuss this again tonight. But at the moment, I will say that I see the value in rooting for anyone who would join Toori-sama’s battle formation.”

After all...

“I am aware of my own weight.”

Their king turned around at that and he nodded.

“I’ve been thinking, Horizon. Don’t you have a fair amount of body weight?”

“I am a proper automaton, so my frame and everything else weighs about 80kg. Of course, each of those parts counts as an automaton component and gains a Tsukumogami ether divine protection, so that is reduced to about 50kg.”

After all that, Musashi’s Princess threw a stone at the king.

A direct hit sent him skipping thrice across the river.

“Why are you asking a girl her weight?”

“I-I didn’t ask! I just said you were pretty heavy!”

The Schwarz Hexen threw a coin-sized rock with a smile on her face.

“You are the worst.”

It hit the king in the forehead and he flipped around in midair.

“W-wait! Black Mal and Gold Mar! Does your weight even matter? I mean, you’ve got those wings, so-...”

The Weiss Hexen threw a coin-sized rock with a smile on her face.

“You are the worst.”

It hit the king in the forehead and he flipped around in midair. He stood back up with a splash.

“A-are you trying to send me to the other bank!?”

The Reine des Garous wanted to join in, but he did not send anything her way.

She realized that her daughter and the others had all finished their work. And the king’s sister...

“Over here, foolish brother! We’ve made lunch, so come and get it!”

By the time Masazumi regrouped with the others, they were already finishing up lunch.

On the way, she passed by Mary, Crossunite, Naito, and Naruze who were headed to the river to wash the dishes and pots.

Back on the riverside, she found the others taking a break.

“Oh? Masazumi. ...There’s plenty of the pot-au-feu over there left. The gyozas were wiped out though.”

“Judge. I’ll gather some stuff for a Western-style meal.”

She piled up the excess bread and poured some pot-au-feu broth in a bowl in place of sauce. The other contents had sunk to the bottom of the pot, but...

*...There’s an awful lot of onion...*

It had probably sweetened up while cooking, but she felt like that much would leave an aftertaste in her throat.

She decided to limit what she took of that and then started getting some jam for the bread.

“Huh? This jam is homemade, but who made it?”

Mary often brought some to the academy, but hers was always berry.

This was citrus. Which meant...

“Yes, I brought that,” said the Reine des Garous. “My husband made it.”

Mitotsudaira was eating some bread with the citrus jam on it, so she shrunk down when she heard that. She must have felt like her mother had realized what kind of flavor she liked.

Horizon was evenly cooking a whole chicken on one stove, but that was likely for Mitotsudaira.

The group that had finished eating was taking a break.

It looked like the first one to finish was Narumi who was drinking a cup of sake and snacking on some chicken skewers at the table in front of Mitotsudaira. It might seem like she was still eating what with the chicken, but that was clearly different.

She was drinking.

She and Urquiaga next to her were putting away the chicken at a rapid pace.

“I feel like my chilled body has finally heated back up. And I really shouldn’t

get drunk right now, so I should probably stop here.”

“Narumi...have you ever been drunk?”

“Are you trying to lower my defenses?”

“And make things boring? Not a chance.”

“Judge then,” said Narumi while she downed the rest of her cup.

Then she took a certain action.

To get at the gizzard at the bottom of the skewer, she stuck the entire skewer straight down her throat.

“Oh,” said everyone when they realized what she had done. Even Masazumi sat down at a nearby table.

*...Is this what you call a hidden talent?*

Narumi swallowed lightly as everyone watched her. And...

“—————”

She somewhat pursed her lips and pulled out the skewer which now had nothing on it. When she saw that, Adele responded while stirring up the bottom of the pot-au-feu to scoop up the contents.

“Amazing! Was that to keep your lipstick off of it!? Oh! Can I take all the onion!?”

“It was because of my lipstick and because I’m only wearing a swimsuit and a shirt. ...And I’ve had enough pot-au-feu.”

Narumi smiled at Adele. And next to her...

“Narumi. I was hoping you would just eat the skewer along with it.”

“It seems this half-dragon is an omnivore.”

But Narumi’s eyes were on Mitotsudaira who had just been given some food by Horizon.

“Here is a chicken skewer larger than Narumi-sama’s. Now, Mitostudaira-sama, you can win this.”

“W-wait just a second! The skewer is 30cm long!”

“Yes,” agreed Narumi. “Sticking that in your throat would be like driving a stake down it.”

Mitotsudaira froze in place.

*...The word “stake” is something of a taboo around Mitotsudaira, isn’t it?*

Kimi looked to Mitotsudaira while using a spatula to slice up the cheese gratin she was making on a grill.

That Rank 1 Musashi Knight eventually looked wordlessly down at the chicken skewer she held while smiling.

Kimi and Horizon both observed the girl.

“Horizon, I feel like I am waiting for a rare animal to make a move.”

“Shh. It’s all over if she notices us, Kimi-sama.”

But Mitotsudaira stopped staring at the chicken skewer and made her move.

She first held it up in front of her eyes. And...

*...Oh!? Is she doing it!? Is she really going to do it!?*

She kept her mouth closed, but she moved the chicken skewer as if to stick it between her lips.

“...”

A few seconds passed.

The result was obvious to Kimi.

*...That isn’t normally going to fit in someone’s throat...*

As Kimi nodded to herself, Mitotsudaira’s shoulders trembled.

She seemed to have noticed the silence around her.

So she looked back in shock and began explaining the movement of the skewer.

“Um, uh, seeing how far it would fit isn’t a vulgar thing to do, is it?”

Everyone just about gave her a sympathetic nod, but Azuma stopped tying up

the unused firewood and asked a question.

“...Would it fit?”

**Wise Sister:** “Heh heh heh. You sex crown prince! You want to step into the lion’s den again, don’t you!?”

**Asama:** “I was going to say this is more of a wolf’s den, but I guess it’s the same thing.”

**Flat Vassal:** “You two are enjoying this on an entirely different level, aren’t you!?”

But Azuma’s question seemed to clue Mitotsudaira into her word choice.

She frantically waved her head and empty hand from side to side.

“Oh, n-no, umm.”

She corrected herself.

“I didn’t mean how far it would fit. Um,” she said. “I meant how much I could swallow.”

“...Eh? Ehh? S-swallow?”

That question came from Suzu. She spread her mouth horizontally and when Mitotsudaira heard her...

“Eh?” she began. “Ah!” she added with trembling shoulders.

Just then, Asama, who had put on a shirt and set up a stove spell, clapped her hands.

That pleasant sound gathered everyone’s attention.

“Don’t you remember, everyone? ...For Mito, beef is a side dish, pork is the main dish, and chicken is a drink. Right!? Isn’t that right!? Mito, you just gulp it down, don’t you!?”

“Eh!? Y-yes, that’s right! Swallowing chicken is easy! The collagen in the skin makes it slide right on down!”

“Is she okay...?” everyone muttered before a large form stepped up.

It was Mitotsudaira’s mother, the Reine des Garous.

*...She sure is big.*

Kimi thought that when she had to look up at all that volume. Kimi thought she had decent size herself, but if she was that large, she felt like she could create a brand new genre of dancing.

*...But does the Reine des Garous dance?*

As that question rolled around in her head, the Reine des Garous walked over while humming. Then she took a large chicken skewer from the plate Horizon held respectfully up.

“Hm, hm, hm, hmm~”

She swallowed it.

She held the bottom of the stake-like skewer in her hand and stuck the rest inside her mouth.

Asama watched that casual skewer-swallowing.

The skewer had to be more than 30cm long. The pieces of chicken were also large, so they would be at least 5cm across.

But the Reine des Garous easily swallowed it all.

*...Eh!?*

*No way!* was Asama’s honest impression.

If you stuck that 30cm skewer in your throat, wouldn’t it pierce out the back of your neck?

**Asama:** “Oh, but Mito’s mom is a spirit-type species, so she would be fine even with a skewer sticking out the back of her neck, wouldn’t she?”

**Silver Wolf:** “You make that sound reasonable, but that’s not how it works at all!”

**Hori-ko:** “Then I will provide the correct answer: I believe Mitotsudaira-sama’s mother has teeth in the back of her throat and they are chewing up the skewer back there.”

**Me:** “Stop! Don’t say that kind of thing when I’m imagining something lewder!”

Everyone was their usual self here.

At any rate, they all gulped. And Suzu...

“————”

...fainted and wobbled. Asama tried to prop her up while adjusting the stove.

“Ah...watch out, Suzu-san! Look, look. It’s an everyday human-skin cushion~”

But someone else moved at the exact same moment.

“Suzu-san!”

It was Adele.

Just as Asama grabbed Suzu, Adele leaped in from the side, trapping herself between Suzu’s back and the bottom of Asama’s breasts.

Adele’s head was buried in Asama’s chest and hidden behind Suzu.

It was some kind of ninja camouflage.

Everyone – including the Reine des Garous – froze as Adele held Suzu from behind.

“H-huh? I can feel it all even through the swimsuit. And there’s so much pressure from behind and above. What is this attack from both the front and back!?”

Asama felt more like this was protecting the girl, but it must have seemed different to Adele.

“Adele.” Asama’s tone was scolding. “You have a persecution complex.”

“E-even though I’m getting scolded when I did nothing wrong!?”

Regardless, they could not stay like this, so Asama removed Adele.

She also saw Suzu take a breath and return to her senses.

Suzu then turned her pale face toward the Reine des Garous.

“A-are you...okay?”

The Reine des Garous let go of the skewer. And she lightly spun around the skewer sticking out of her lips.

“Nn.”

That noise was likely meant to be a “yes” to Suzu’s question.

Asama glanced over to see Mitotsudaira just as dumbfounded as her.

But as everyone watched on, the Reine des Garous grabbed the skewer again.

She winked at Asama and bent her head back a bit.

“Heh hehh.”

With a nasal laugh, she pulled the skewer from her lips.

She bit down on something in her cheek and pulled out the 30cm skewer.

It was fully intact and glistening wetly.

“Ohh...!”

Horizon and then everyone else applauded.

But the size of the skewer and her head simply did not match up. It clearly should have pierced out the back of her head.

“Um, mother, how did you do that?”

“Oh, dear. Do you think you’re going to need that oral technique of mine, Nate? ...Yes, it is necessary when you want to swallow a stake.”

“...No. I was just curious.”

“My, my.” The Loup-Garou mother placed her empty hand on her cheek and held up the skewer that had been in her throat.

She turned her head to the side. She then moved the skewer so it passed by the side of her mouth and alongside her cheek.

It was not quite an X-ray view, but the skewer passed by next to her face.

“Listen. At this point, it would hit the back of your throat, right?”

“Judge,” they all agreed.

The Reine des Garous then stopped the hand holding the skewer.

She used her empty hand to brush back her hair and show off her neck.

After that, she extended her head forward a bit. It was a simple action similar to raising her chin, but...

“If you angle the stake a bit, it can pass from your mouth to your throat in a straight line. Yes, just like that.”

“Eh?”

*Like that?* wondered Asama as she looked in the direction Mitotsudaira’s mother pointed.

While sitting next to Horizon and Toori, Kimi was swallowing a skewer to the base.



“K-Kimi! Wait!”

Kimi turned toward Asama’s voice.

“Hohoo, hohoo.”

With that odd noise, she did the same thing the Reine des Garous had.

She tilted her head back and pulled out just the skewer.

She then took a breath with the flavor of chicken in her throat. She noted how fragrant a flavor it was while she smiled at the others.

“That’s a basic technique.”

“It really is,” agreed the Reine des Garous.

They were both aware that this was not a competition. This performance of theirs was something else.

*...A game. Using everyone else.*

**Silver Wolf:** “Kimi...what is that, um, sense of camaraderie you have with my mother?”

There was only one answer for Mitotsudaira’s question.

Kimi exchanged a glance with Mitostudaira’s mother and they both turned toward her at once.

They both held the tip of their skewers between their lips, held them gently between their fingers, moved them in and out a few times, and then used their tongues to push them out. Lastly, they spoke at the exact same time.

“Heh heh. ...You’re such a child.”

“She really is,” added the parent, which made Mitotsudaira’s shoulders shake.

“Wh-what is that supposed to mean!?”

But the mother paid her no heed.

“Listen,” she said while looking to each of the girls in turn. “There is an angle to your throat. But you have a lot of room in your mouth, so if you wrap your tongue around the stake from below and push up on it to angle it, it will go in easier. ...But you don’t want to cause too much stimulation with your teeth, so

keep that to a minimum, okay? One other trick is to think of it like swallowing air. That way you won't gag."

One part of that sounded rather ominous, but no one but Asama came to a stop, so it was probably fine.

Asama had gasped, but when she noticed no one else reacting...

"H-huh...?"

"What is it, Asama-san?"

"O-oh, it's nothing. Nothing at allll. Ah ha ha ha. Also, um..." The shrine maiden forced a smile and clapped her hands. "There. I've changed the mood!"

As everyone glared at her, she tried to dodge the issue by speaking to the Reine des Garous.

"That was incredible! How did you learn to do something like that?"

"Well, I do it every meal back home."

"You eat meat like that every meal!? I guess that's Mito's mom for you!"

"Yes, my husband is just so full of energy."

Asama froze.

**Wise Sister:** "Asama, do you feel like you stepped on a landmine, were blown away, and landed on another landmine?"

**Asama:** "N-no, she might have meant that she eats yakiniku with her energetic husband! I'll admit it isn't likely, though!"

**Silver Wolf:** "Can you stop implicitly turning my family home into a sex kingdom!?"

However...

"Listen up."

Mitotsudaira's mother once more held the skewer between her lips.

She smiled and stuck out her tongue to push the skewer back out into the air.

"Once you can swallow this, the next lesson is how to apply pressure with your lips, suck on it, and move it in and out at varying speeds."

“Mother! You’re taking this in a very inappropriate direction, aren’t you!? I knew I couldn’t trust you!”

“Eh? What are you talking about, Nate? You’re the one that started this. I was only helping out because you couldn’t do it yourself.”

“I did nothing of the sort!”

**Asama:** “Actually, it did look an awful lot like that was what you were doing, Mito.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Eh!? N-no, I didn’t go anywhere near this far!”

**Unturning:** “Hm... To be honest, I think I started this...”

They were all being very much themselves.

*...They really never change.*

Kimi looked to her brother who was holding up and staring at a skewer.

“Foolish brother, are you going to do it!? You are, aren’t you!? Which will it be!? The butt!? The urethra?”

“Sis! Sis! Wouldn’t the front one be a bit of a challenge!? It’d probably clear up any kind of blockage, though!”

Masazumi gave them a displeased look because she was trying to eat, but they ignored her. However...

“Kimi! What are you trying to get my king to do!?”

The overprotective knight shouted at her.

And just as Mitotsudaira tried to approach with a meat skewer in one hand, the sound of metal on stone sounded from behind them.

*...Oh?*

That was where the group washing things in the river had been.

Kimi looked back to see what this was about and saw Naruze there.

Her eyes and mouth were opened wide and she had dropped a freshly-cleaned pot on the riverside rocks.

Finally, she looked at the skewer in Mitotsudaira’s hand and the one the

Reine des Garous had.

“W-wait, what are you all of you doing!? Why are you having this kind of fun while I’m not around!?”

“We are not having fun!!” insisted Mitotsudaira.

*Oh, I certainly am,* thought Kimi with a tilt of the head.

Asama heard the Weiss Hexen’s crazed voice and saw her point at Mitotsudaira.

“Call me before doing this kind of thing! It’s great reference material!”

“She just called me reference material!”

But the black-winged girl was not listening. She instead embraced her partner’s shoulders.

“And just when Margot and I were in the water working up some bubbles and saying ‘Hee hee, it’s always so fun being able to cross your arms while washing dishes’ and ‘Ga-chan, you have bubbles on your nose’!”

“...Why isn’t that enough to satisfy you?”

“They’re two entirely different things! And what is with this!? Are you having a meat rod swallowing contest to celebrate our victory over Takigawa since her Urban Name is Demon Guardian?<sup>[6]</sup> And why wouldn’t you want me to see? Do you not want to be in a doujinshi!?”

“I don’t think people normally do.”

Hearing that, Naruze leaped into Naito’s chest.

“Margot, Asama is making a sensible argument against me!”

“Yes, yes. It’s okay, Ga-chan. Asama-chi sometimes makes sensible arguments, doesn’t she?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever been criticized for that before!”

Tenzou and Mary walked up behind them carrying a pot and a mess kit.

Mary looked at Naruze who was pretending to cry and clinging to Naito, at

the Loup-Garou mother and daughter and Kimi who were holding skewers, and at Asama.

“Um, what is going on here?”

*That’s what I would like to know,* thought Asama, but she held her tongue.

Just then, Masazumi nodded after having moved far enough away to not be caught up in it all.

“How should I put this? ...Mary, it has nothing to do with you and Crossunite.”

Asama agreed. Everyone exchanged a quick glance and nodded.

**Silver Wolf:** “W-we can’t bring up this ‘oral technique’ business with Mary!”

**Hori-ko:** “Very true. Mary-sama is an English Princess. We cannot get her involved.”

**Unturning:** “But it’s okay for the Mito Lord and Musashi’s Vicereine?”

**Asama:** “All right! Being the Asama Shrine Representative wasn’t enough to get counted!”

**Almost Everyone:** “Is that really a good thing!?”

Now that she thought about it, no. But there was something she had to say.

Asama put on a full-face smile and said to Mary the same thing Masazumi had.

“Y-yes, don’t worry, Mary. This is not anything you and Tenzou-kun need to think about.”

Mary felt a moment of relief at what Masazumi and Asama said.

Something was worrying the others, but they had been considerate enough to make sure she was not involved.

She appreciated that.

*...It shows how much the class cares about Master Tenzou and me.*

*But,* she added.

More than 2 months had passed since she arrived on the Far East's Musashi. That was not a full year, but with each passing month, she had grown more accustomed to life here and come to understand the customs on the Musashi.

So she had a thought.

*...I can't rely on their kindness forever.*

She wanted to be a resident of Musashi on the same level as the others.

She did have her status as an English Princess, but she was prepared to fight on the front line or perform hard labor if necessary.

So she spoke up while grabbing a freshly-washed metal skewer used for cooking things over a fire.

"It's all right, everyone. You don't have to be so kind. ...Do not say this has nothing to do with me or is something I don't need to think about. I will work at it too!"

"...Ehh!?"

Everyone – including the Reine des Garous – voiced their surprise.

Everyone's reaction told Mary she had been right.

They were surprised by her suggestion.

And that could only mean one thing.

*...They were discussing something quite difficult.*

Their concern was clear when Mitotsudaira turned toward her with a chicken skewer in hand.

"U-um, Mary? Do you...know what we were talking about?"

"I do."

Mary was decisive. She had not actually heard the discussion, but she could make a good guess what they would be discussing with the Houjou battle so soon.

After all, they were facing something even greater than the battle the other

night.

*...The battles with the Sanada ninjas were entirely outside the ordinary. So...*

"I am not sure how to put it, but this is a difficult thing that your average person could never do."

"That's true!"

Everyone turned to look at Kimi and the Reine des Garous.

But Mitotsudaira...

"W-wait just a minute! Mary, do you really know what we were talking about!?"

"Eh?"

Mary tilted her head.

They had to have been talking about Houjou.

Today was the travel day and she knew they would spend that day negotiating with Houjou. But negotiations could take a number of forms, so they would have been planning what exactly they would do. Mary chose the best words she could to describe those speaking methods.

"You were discussing oral techniques, weren't you?"

"Eh!?"

This time, it was Mitotsudaira who tilted her head. And her face grew red.

*...Oral techniques!?*

**Mal-Ga:** "Yessssssssssssssss!!"

**Asama:** "No comment! No comment!"

**Novice:** "Must you people always make a scene?"

But Mitotsudaira had definitely heard it.

And she could not exactly deny it.

"W-we were certainly talking about such...techniques. Y-yes, we were!"

She felt like she should not have asked this.

But Mary was her friend, so she worked up her courage.

“M-Mary? Um, just to be absolutely sure...could you repeat that?”

“Eh?” Mary placed a hand on her cheek. “Well, um,” she said. “Yes, I said oral techniques.”

Mary saw everyone react the same way to what she said.

Everyone in front of her and Naito and Naruze next to her all fell silent.

They said nothing.

And they did not move.

The only sounds reaching her ears were from the flowing river and the waterfall that fell down into the Asama Shrine’s atrium.

*...Uhh.*

“Um, oral techniques are important, aren’t they?”

“Well, yes, I suppose they are!”

She was not sure what to make of that response. She began to wonder if she had said something wrong.

So she decided to check.

“Master Tenzou, oral techniques is the correct term, isn’t it?”

“J-judge! That gets the point across, I think.”

“You are the worst,” spat out Naruze, but Mary was unsure why.

Had she said anything to make the others suspicious? So...

“Um, is there anything weird about what I am referring to?”

“Hey, hey, Tenzou,” said the Chancellor. “Is yours weird?”

“I-is my what weird!?”

“Oh,” said Mary. “Master Tenzou is not weird at all.”

Hearing that, everyone formed a scrum and began whispering to each other.

“How are we supposed to respond to that...?”

“What kind of order is Tenzou using for these things?”

“I’m afraid we’re going to get more detail than we want, so could we stop this?”

After a few seconds, Musashi’s Princess stepped out and raised her right hand.

“Tenzou-sama, we are willing to give you this one, so rest easy. We will accept that yours is not weird.”

“What is with this weird nuance in everything you’re saying!?” shouted Tenzou.

Just then, a sign frame appeared over their heads. It displayed “Musashi”.

Mary always thought that automaton looked so dignified. When “Musashi” silently bowed, Mary bowed in return.

And then the automaton’s voice reached them.

“A ship is approaching from the southwest.”

It was...

“It has identified itself as a Mouri diplomatic ship belonging to Hexagone Française. Its representative is Mouri Terumoto-sama. She and the Houjou Representative have sent a divine transmission requesting a meeting. What shall we do? Over.”

Terumoto slowly spoke in the afternoon sky.

“Looks like we won’t be able to board the Musashi itself. I’ve always wanted to board it just once, to see what an aerial city ship is like.”

She was on the deck of the Mouri diplomatic ship.

Their ship was flying toward the front of the Musashi while sliding in toward its left side.

The ship's shape made it difficult to lower their speed when flying straight ahead. The standard methods were to reverse the acceleration system or tilt the virtual ocean in the opposite direction to brake, but Terumoto did things differently.

She had the ship slide to the side so air resistance did the braking for them.

That was why her ship had its sails fully open, which was rare for aerial ships.

"Hey! Tilt the ship a little more! If the virtual ocean flows to the side, it won't provide any resistance!"

"Testament, Terumoto-sama! We will show you what we can do!"

With those words from the bridge, the ship tilted.

*...Ohh.*

The deck tilted enough that she had to brace herself to avoid falling over.

The virtual ocean, which covered from the bottom of the ship to the waterline, bent in the wind and tossed spray into the air.

The wind became a salty mist, climbed up the side of the ship, and struck the sails.

The water resistance and wind resistance from the bottom and the top easily caused the ship to groan.

The joints of the hardened wood cried out and the mast bent with a deep sound.

But Terumoto showed off her teeth when she heard it.

"Okay, just like that! Make sure the ship isn't tossed around by the recoil!"

"Testament!"

The sideways-sliding scenery showed the Musashi right in front of them now.

Their ship came just above the front deck of Musashino.

"Okay! Good job, everyone!!"

The ship slid through a braking turn and came to a stop.

Once it stopped, the ship rose up, but they controlled that as well.

The ship shook back the other way and plates could be heard shattering inside the ship.

But that was all.

Terumoto's ship was 20m above Musashino's front deck.

That was pretty high up, but it was still extremely close. As the sun shined down on that layout, Terumoto opened her mouth.

She crossed her arms and spoke.

“Musashi Representative! Get on up here! Let's discuss our plans for tomorrow!!”

# **Chapter 19: Lip Service Girls on the Deck**

## 第十九章

### 『甲板上的口先娘達』



仕方ないので  
私は君を殴りつける  
配点 (交渉)

*It can't be helped*

*So I will hit you*

### **Point Allocation (Negotiation)**

The Suwa-bound transport ship soon received a notification that the meeting with Mouri and Houjou had begun at the Musashi. Noriki received the report from Hiro as he helped clean the deck.

"...So they've started."

Musashi was far to the southeast.

He could see a dark blue shadow in that direction.

That would be the Musashi.

*...It seems almost insignificant from a distance.*

Noriki looked to the girl who had opened the sign frame for him.

"Hiro, was it?"

"What is it, Noririn?"

"...Did you get that from Naito?"

"Judge. That's what they call you at home, right?"

"At home, they call me brother."

Hearing that, Hiro's expression stiffened.

"Um, sorry."

"For what?"

"...Do you...like jokes?"

"...I do watch divine TV variety shows with my younger siblings."

"Such as?"

"Well," said Noriki with a nod.

His younger siblings knew a lot about those shows from their friends in

elementary and middle school.

But he only watched them because they did.

Still, he knew which show his younger brothers and sisters most enjoyed.

"Teacup Dash, where 5 people get into a serious fight over tea supplies."

"Oh, yeah. They did one on a Mediterranean desert island recently where they were chased around by the primitive tentacles, didn't they? It takes a show like that for no one to accuse it of being staged."

"Yes. ...I'm still trying to figure out why people enjoy that show."

Hiro's expression froze. After a while, she hung her head with sweat pouring down her face.

Noriki could tell this was bad, so...

"Hey."

"...Ah! Sorry! Sorry, okay!? Let's get back on topic!"

He was troubling an underclassman.

He did not really mean it as a way to make up for that, but he decided to ask what he had intended to earlier.

"Are you familiar with Suwa?"

"Somewhat. I've never actually lived there, though. ...How about you?"

"I apparently went there long ago. And I've sent a few divine transmissions there and gathered information from their sites using Musashi's Suwa via the Asama Shrine."

"Then this physical visit will be a good thing for you. ...Don't worry. They're trying to run a business, so it won't be too complicated."

"I see," he said while getting back to mopping the deck.

But then Hiro asked a sudden question.

"What do you think of Houjou Ujinao?"

"I can't really say." He responded immediately. "Our positions are different. Any thoughts would have to come after our positions are the same. Otherwise,

it is irrelevant."

"You really aren't the joking type, are you?"

"If you get that, then don't do it again."

But Noriki had another thought.

*...I don't talk much, do I?*

He felt like he had talked a lot today, but it was still nothing compared to Toori and the others.

So he kept speaking to avoid an awkward silence with Hiro.

"The first thing you have to keep in mind is that my father betrayed Houjou."

"That sure is a heavy change of topic... But just out of curiosity, what do you mean?"

"He tried to prepare an heir and someone to support that heir, but luck was not on his side."

"Oh." Hiro nodded. "And so your position changed."

"When my father came to Musashi, he hoped we would be able to make ourselves at home in our new life there."

"...I think you've managed to do that."

He could not decide if he should thank her for that. But...

"I cannot return to my position there. ...Because I am of Musashi."

"Then how about you bring Houjou Ujinao to us?"

"That is for Masazumi and the others to decide."

"Then," said Hiro again. "Why are you going to Suwa?"

"To return with greater power."

Noriki knew she was going to ask what that power was for, so he continued before she could do so.

"Power to destroy Ujinao's position. ...I cannot say anything to her if I do not do that."

"I'm glad you came, Musashi Vice President. We only have a short time before this battle in which our respective positions are clear, so let us make good use of it."

"Judge. Let us discuss something meaningful to all three of us."

Masazumi viewed her surroundings and Terumoto responded with her arms crossed.

"There's nothing worth seeing around here. It's all just for show."

"Lady Terumoto! That's what makes it so cool!!"

They were in an open-air meeting room and the diplomatic ship's girls shouted over at them.

The Mouri diplomatic ship had a flat deck with a flat roof built on top of that. It was quite different from the Far Eastern standard for diplomatic ships that placed a Far Eastern style mansion atop a sled-like flat ship.

*...Is that for defense?*

They currently stood on that roof. It was 300m long and 50m wide. It had wood flooring and there was indeed nothing there, but...

"This would normally be used for open-air concerts or plays. You can see the foundation for tiered audience seating behind you, right? And the stage is erected on the bow here."

"Yes." Masazumi nodded. "We have similar ships. We call them theatre ships, but does this double as one of those?"

"Testament. Exiv likes that kind of thing. He can't seem to part ways with those fantasies and stories."

"Louis XIV loved plays enough to write scripts and perform in them himself, right?"

Terumoto smiled bitterly at that.

"He sees the whole world like that. ...That's what you call pride. He insists everything will play out the way he wants it to."

"That certainly is prideful."

That was Masazumi's honest opinion. And it seemed Terumoto was not joking either. There was no falsehood or affectation in her nod.

Hexagone Française had pride, the power to back up that pride, and the history as well.

The Testament promised that king he would be a conqueror. Thus the pride.

*...I guess that's what it means to be both a large and powerful nation.*

It was simply the truth.

Terumoto, one of that nation's leaders, turned toward the maid *Belle de Marionnettes* that carried in a thick table by making it hover. She spoke to the maid in the lead who had long blonde hair.

"We don't need any chairs for now. We can sit once we've reached more of a decision."

"Testament, princess. ...What about tea for our guests?"

"You stay here and prepare some, Mouri-01."

"Testament," said the maid named Mouri-01. She then looked to the rear deck.

Masazumi also looked back and saw a cargo lift that descended into the ship.

The lift was piled high with flower-laden side tables and sweets-filled buckets.

Mouri-01 beckoned toward a side table with a tea set on it.

Immediately, the side table bearing a pot and cups slid across the deck.

*...Oh?*

Masazumi understood this was gravitational control.

But it was very precise. The table did not wobble and its speed was unwavering.

**Mal-Ga:** "That's too accurate. ...Want to try sniping her, Margot?"

**Gold Mar:** "Maybe if it takes a collision course toward Seijun. Oh, but..."

Masazumi soon realized what had caught Naito's attention.

At the lift, the pile of tables, flower pots, sweets, and snacks had all floated up.

"Okay."

Terumoto's word acted as a cue. It all slid toward them, circled around, gently lowered its speed, and danced through the air.

"—————"

The flowers were piled up, the tablecloth laid out, and partitions and decorative plants lined up around them. And with one last wobble...

"I hope this is sufficient."

Mouri-01 spoke and it all came to a stop.

In an instant, the tea party was prepared before Masazumi's eyes.

A gentle wind blew through. It was a wind of the open sky, but the ship's buffering reduced it to a light breeze.

*This wind wasn't here before,* thought Masazumi.

She realized Mouri-01 had begun pouring the teapot's contents into cups. She used her gravitational control to serve them on the table, and...

"Would you like some as well, Lady Terumoto?"

"Pour me a cup too. This won't last long, but I know I'll be thirsty."

Masazumi focused on the people behind her.

**Vice President:** "Horizon, Asama, and Mitotsudaira. That's a fair number of people."

**Me:** Me too, me too, me too. Can you not see me? I'm here. Right here."

Without even looking over, Horizon hit him with a punch to the side.

It produced a decent sound and Terumoto nodded.

"Not bad."

Horizon also nodded.

"I can also do joint locks. I learned them from a site on the divine network."

"Umm, does that mean you've been attacking me with moves you only ever saw written about on the divine network?"

*I imagine so*, thought Masazumi as she faced forward.

"What about you? Who else did you bring to this meeting?"

"Mouri-01 will be supporting me, but we've got plenty more people below deck. Also..."

Terumoto looked to the lift.

A few figures were visible where the table sets and flowers had been lined and piled up before. The chairs had been left behind and a person had a small ninja Mouse with her: "Houjou Ujinao."

"Testament. ...It has been a while, Musashi Vice President."

"Me too! Me too, me too! We met before too!"

Ujinao turned toward the idiot but then frowned.

"...?"

**Hori-ko:** "Does she not remember you? I suppose we could not expect an unpopular entertainer to leave more of an impact..."

**Me:** "Wait! You can't count me out quite yet!"

*Fine, then*, thought Masazumi. She decided to help him out here because leaving him to his own devices would be far more dangerous.

So she thought back to that previous meeting and spoke.

"You remember there being a weird nudist around when we met with Yoshitsune and the others at that IZUMO bar, right? He did the topknot."

"Oh, that's right."

Ujinao nodded and the idiot shouted down at the Musashi visible off the port side of the deck.

"Did you hear that!? My nudity is like my calling card! We can't even start the

diplomacy until I strip!"

After about 3 seconds, a bullet flew from the Musashi and grazed the idiot along the side of the head.

**Mal-Ga:** "Ah, I missed. Margot, why did that happen? Did I setup Schwarz Fräulein wrong?"

**Gold Mar:** "Hmm, the height was correct and you took the earth's rotation into account, so it was probably their atmospheric buffering that sent it off course."

**Me:** "Wait! Are you trying to kill me!?"

**Tachibana Wife:** "No, I think that would only have caused three flips."

**Tachibana Husband:** "Ha ha. Gin, that is a rather low assessment."

*They never, ever change, do they?* thought Masazumi.

"Anyway," said Ujinao as she removed two swords from her shoulders. She placed them on a chair sitting on the lift and she reattached the ones on her hips to their hard points.

*...Is that to show she does not intend to fight but is not letting her guard down?*

Houjou had to have their thoughts on this too.

Masazumi decided she might as well ask about someone else.

"Where is P.A. Oda's Takigawa?"

"She is acting independently of us." Terumoto shrugged. "P.A. Oda is supposed to be the enemy of both Mouri and Houjou. But what we've done will probably be seen as assisting Takigawa's history recreation. ...Of course, that is more than worth it if some of Musashi's forces are diverted to deal with her."

Mouri really was their enemy. In that case...

"What is your reasoning for having us play Hashiba's role in the Siege of

Bitchu Takamatsu Castle?"

"They are currently attacking Hexagone Française. That is a violation of the history recreation. Because it ignores that we wanted to do the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle here, you see. And so we hoped Musashi would fill in for P.A. Oda in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle we have prepared. ...Seeing as you're Matsudaira, who should be part of Hashiba's forces in this time period."

*...That was fast.*

Masazumi realized the meeting had already begun.

The others must have noticed too because words appeared on her sign frame.

**Novice:** "She's trying to restrict our actions here, isn't she?"

**Flat Vassal:** "Eh? What do you mean? Wasn't that just stating the current situation?"

It was more than that.

**Vice President:** "Mouri Terumoto just said that Hashiba did not show up for their Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, so Mouri chose Matsudaira as a replacement because we 'work for Hashiba in this time period'."

The implications of that must have gotten through to them because everyone briefly fell silent.

Eventually, Mitotsudaira spoke.

**Silver Wolf:** "So...she's saying we are supposed to be working for Hashiba?"

**Vice President:** "Precisely. ...Basically, she is pointing out that we are somewhat ignoring the history recreation in our actions. And she is implicitly telling us to turn a blind eye to any minor issues on their side."

*She is a forceful negotiator,* thought Masazumi.

"It would seem everyone is here," said Ujinao.

She now stood across the table from Masazumi and some distance to Terumoto's side. That distance showed they were not united but they were on the same side.

Terumoto crossed her arms when she saw Ujinao's positioning.

"Then let's keep this simple. I don't like complicated things."

She took a breath and said more.

"Anne said a lot at Magdeburg, didn't she?"

"Judge. ...We heard a lot from her then."

The present situation was thanks to that.

Terumoto gave a deep nod when she saw Masazumi was aware of that.

She raised her eyebrows a bit, crossed her arms, and then slowly opened her mouth.

"How about we throw all that out?"

*Eh?* thought Mitotsudaira.

*...Aren't we supposed to be reaching a consensus about the battle tomorrow!?*

Why would they suddenly bring up that secret meeting at Magdeburg?

"Listen carefully, all of you." Terumoto uncrossed her arms and pointed into the western sky to the left. "You said you were going to stop Hashiba or whatever, but Hashiba is already at our doorstep."

**Bell:** "A neighborhood...friend...?"

**Flat Vassal:** "It does sound like it, but that's probably not what she means."

**Wise Sister:** "But come to think of it, Hashiba really is attacking them, aren't they?"

**Hori-ko:** "Now, Masazumi-sama, how will you respond to this brutal attack right off the bat?"

**Vice President:** "Must be nice not being in the hot seat!!"

**Righteousness:** "Wait just a second. ...Oh, and I can see all this. That's not a problem, is it?"

**Vice President:** "No, that's not a problem. This has to do with Kantou, so it's

best for you to see it, Satomi Student Council President. ...So what it is?"

**Righteousness:** "Musashi became Hashiba's enemy because of the Magdeburg meeting. We said we would fight back against Hashiba, who had become a threat to Europe, in order to gain European support as Westphalia approaches. That was the reasoning, right?"

Yoshiyasu voiced her objection.

**Righteousness:** "So why would they criticize us on that now? Hexagone Française is Hashiba's enemy as well, so why would they use that to bind us?"

Masazumi knew what she was trying to say and understood why she was saying it.

Terumoto was essentially saying that Hexagone Française had set them up.

Hexagone Française had pushed them to action and was now using that action as a shield to attack them.

Yoshiyasu was calling that unfair. However...

**Vice President:** "That is what we call international politics. Got that, Satomi Student Council President?"

Meaning...

**Vice President:** "We agreed to their suggestion. From that point on, all responsibility lies with us. If you agree to something while fully prepared for anything that might mean, then you must also be prepared for the proposer to backstab you. If a mistake was made, it is my responsibility for not preparing any kind of insurance against betrayal."

"So," said Masazumi.

**Vice President:** "This is no more than some light jabs. Think about it. They are asking us to not question the areas where Mouri has gone too far. This is not a threat or a warning from Mouri. They are going in strong and giving us a hint of how harsh international exchanges can be, but they are effectively lowering their heads to us. Do you know what that is called?"

**Me:** "...B-bowing?"

**Vice President:** "It's vainglory, you idiot."

**Me:** "Th-the person who resorts to calling someone an idiot is the real idiot. Heh hehh. Seijun, you idiot!!"

Responding would only encourage him, so she focused on ignoring him.

*But*, she thought. The night before, she had decided to claim they had cornered Hashiba as per Anne's request. She had intended to use that as a bargaining chip against Hashiba in Europe. But now...

*...They want us to do away with Anne's negotiation entirely.*

*Now, then*, thought Masazumi. *Why did Mouri change their mind?*

*...I mean, it is true they're under attack by Hashiba.*

That was blatantly obvious.

*...So is that the motivation behind this?*

She tilted her head and tapped her sign frame.

**Vice President:** "Hey, Treasurer, are you ready to prostrate?"

**Marube-ya:** "Huh!? Prostrations are the product of one's ever-changing mood and can't be forced, but money could always overcome that issue! How much!?"

**Vice President:** "Never mind then."

**Worshiper:** "That was fast! That was a fast decision, Flat Honda-kun!"

Masazumi concluded that the Treasurer was useless.

But if Mouri was here to protest the Hashiba invasion...

**Vice President:** "Does that make this a protest negotiation...?"

**Silver Wolf:** "Masazumi! Good job getting the right kanji for that one!"<sup>[7]</sup>

*Getting it right is normal.*

*But*, thought Masazumi. If they were doing away with the negotiation between Anne and Musashi, it meant they no longer thought Musashi could corner Hashiba. Also, the Roi-Soleil was on the verge of a battle with Hashiba back in Hexagone Française. Which meant...

*...They have no intention of negotiating with Hashiba to stop Hashiba's attack...*

"So...what does that mean, Mouri Terumoto?"

"Testament, surely you already know that: you failed to hold up your end of the bargain. ...You didn't stop Hashiba. It's no more than that."

*Not what I meant*, thought Masazumi with a mental click of her tongue. Terumoto had just dodged the question.

*...You're hiding your real purpose here, aren't you!?*

But Terumoto moved her fingers. She lightly flicked the table.

"You have not kept your promise, so I would like to retract the promise Anne made with you. ...The promise to side with you at Westphalia."

The surface of Musashino had rows of student housing at the center.

Most of them had been destroyed when the Sanada Terrestrial Dragon named Torahide went on his rampage the other day, so largescale repairs were underway.

The overall plan was to remove wide block segments down to the third level belowground and replace them, guide frames and all. The initial removal had taken some time for fear of unexpected accidents, but...

"Once the replacement work begins, it doesn't take long."

Ookubo viewed the construction site with a protective yellow *kanzashi* in her hair.

She heard the clanging of metal and the crackling sparks of welding. The attachment of the guide frame and wide block segments required moving the damaged materials out of the way, so starting from the outer edges would

delay construction. That was why the construction customarily began from the center.

Currently, a transport ship was using a suspended pallet to lower a portion of an atrium nature park into place. The segment already had trees growing from it and it was lowered into a large hole opened in Musashino.

The bottom was visible when the sun shined down it, but it was still a further hole at the bottom of an atrium.

"It's so big," muttered Ookubo as she looked up into the sky.

The Mouri diplomatic ship was in the sky, although not quite overhead.

Their Vice President was holding a meeting there. She would be debating Mouri and Houjou's representatives about the battle beginning tomorrow.

Ookubo was not following along with the divine chat.

The Representative Committee Head only worked for the high ranking officers. She was said to be equal to the Special Duty Officers, but she actually worked for them and her authority was technically lower than theirs. Also...

*...If I read the records of the Vice President's meeting, I know I'll see a lot that makes me question her sanity again...*

She would listen to the report once a decision was made. The real-time commentary would drive her insane.

Besides, no matter how much she complained...

"I know the Vice President can work this out..."

With that, she reached for the bamboo bottle hanging from her waist hard point part.

It was summer.

The construction site was quite sunny, so she was thirsty.

She listened to the pounding of hammers while drinking the *yuzu* sports drink her mother had made at home.

She tasted the tartness of citrus and the unique flavor of *yuzu* followed by a honey aftertaste deep in her throat.

She heard the cicada cries and realized, *Yes, it is that season, isn't it?*

"Milady! Excuse me, but it's Kanou! The Vice President just screwed up at the meeting up there! She was told we will not receive support at Westphalia because Hashiba attacked Mouri!"

Ookubo spat out her sports drink.

**Nagaya-Stable:** "Vice President! What are you doing!?"

*Ahh, I wish she hadn't noticed this,* thought Masazumi.

Ookubo tended to notice small details, but she had a bad habit of expecting others to do the same.

So Masazumi ignored the sign frame of complaints and faced Terumoto.

*...It is true that Hashiba's invasion means we ran out of time to uphold our end of the bargain.*

So what were they supposed to do?

At this rate, they would receive no support at Westphalia, which had been their initial goal.

That would leave them in a disadvantaged position for the Peace of Westphalia, but...

**Nagaya-Stable:** "You've screwed up a political decision, Vice President! You're in trouble now! All of the fighting you forced on everyone since Magdeburg has been a waste! You should think about what this means for your future!"

**Vice President:** "Yes, and since you accepted my decision, you should think about what this means for your future as well."

**Nagaya-Stable:** "...Eh?"

**Vice President:** "What do you mean 'eh'? ...This should be obvious. At the special student general assembly, you challenged my position but ultimately accepted it."

So to sum up...

**Vice President:** "When I go down, I'm definitely taking you with me. ...And if you don't like that, you'd better think up three different ways of combating public opinion."

**Nagaya-Stable:** "Y-you are the worst! That is unnecessarily cruel!"

Ookubo complained, but she would still do her job.

Having a capable underclassman really took a load of your mind.

"...Now, then."

They had to do something about Mouri.

For now, she had to think up a few different excuses. But first...

"I have a question for Mouri." Masazumi chose her words carefully. "Let us say, hypothetically, that Musashi has not upheld our promise from Magdeburg."

"Ohh, ohh. You have guts. And?"

Masazumi swallowed a groan of indignation and continued.

"In that scenario, *what would Mouri demand of Musashi?*"

*Going with that, are we?* thought Terumoto.

If Musashi's Vice President had asked *what Mouri would do* in that scenario...

*...I would just bluntly say I'm not telling her Mouri's plans.*

But that was not the question. Musashi's Vice President had chosen her words such that Musashi was involved. And she had made sure to ask what they would "demand" in "that scenario".

She was asking if Mouri intended to demand some kind of repayment for Musashi failing to uphold their promise.

If Terumoto said nothing here, there would be no demand made of Musashi.

If she did make a demand, Musashi would be able to put together a countermeasure against it.

It was a decent form for a two-option question.

They had whittled away all excess so they could determine their opponent's intent while they were attacked.

*...That's how a small nation responds.*

They stuck with it to the bitter end and never once let their guard down.

They attempted every last method of survival.

In a positive light, it made them persistent.

In a negative light, it made them desperate and stubborn.

*This could be troublesome,* thought Terumoto with a deep sigh in her heart.

"I have to hand it to Anne."

Matsudaira would become a large nation, but they primarily took a defensive stance. They negotiated by latching onto their opponent's statements and stripping them of value.

*...No, it isn't just that.*

A large nation could not be run by defense alone.

When a large and expanding nation negotiated, they would always have periods of attack.

So when would that arrive?

Terumoto spoke with that in mind.

"There is one thing we must demand of the Far East for failing to stop Hashiba."

That was...

"We ask that you give Hexagone Française rights to the history of Matsudaira, rulers of the Far East."

Because...

"You have not stopped Hashiba as they attempt to conquer the Far East, so we cannot entrust you with ruling the Far East."

"Listen carefully."

The Roi-Soleil listened to Terumoto's voice from the roof of the Louvre Palace, a mansion in the center of Paris.

"Tomorrow, our stupid sun will defeat Hashiba. Once that happens, Anne's promise with Musashi will lose all meaning."

She did not follow that up by asking if they understood, but the Roi-Soleil spoke quietly all the same.

"I understand, Terumoto. This is what you are telling us."

"Hexagone Française and Mouri are the strongest. We have overcome the worries of the previous Chancellor, Anne, and we are advancing to the next stage. That is what this means."

So...

"Leave the world domination to us and hand over all your rights, Musashi."

Masazumi heard what Terumoto said.

*...I can't believe this.*

If who got to control the world was decided by how they handled Hashiba, they would be at a severe disadvantage.

That would instead give an opportunity to Hexagone Française as they fought Hashiba in Paris the following day.

That meant Hexagone Française had the advantage at the moment.

After all...

**Novice:** "We don't have tomorrow's results yet, so they can say whatever they want. They can puff themselves up with impunity."

**Hori-ko:** "Ho ho? ...This means we should root for Hashiba-sama tomorrow, doesn't it?"

**Gold Mar:** "That is quite the interpretation there."

But they were right.

Terumoto's negotiation was a problem at the moment. She was supporting her side using the future, which did not allow for immediate confirmation or denial. And...

*...Vainglory is difficult to work with.*

Masazumi thought about that word.

If Terumoto was puffing herself up and stating things about someone else, her statements could be rejected.

But she was puffing herself up and stating things about herself. Since it began and ended on her side, there was no room for Masazumi to interrupt.

There was only one effective thing she could say to Terumoto now.

**Vice President:** "If only I could say we wait and see what happens tomorrow."

**Asama:** "We're fighting tomorrow too, so our situation could change again."

**Silver Wolf:** "Also, this meeting is about the present."

That was exactly it.

This vainglory had time and the situation on its side.

"How about it, Musashi? Hand over your power. The power that Anne left with you."

"Let me ask one thing."

Masazumi tried speaking to Terumoto, but...

"No. ...I don't think so, Musashi."

Terumoto smiled.

"Listen," she began. "Before, you asked a question and I gave an answer. So now it is time for you to answer my question. ...So what will it be? Will you hand over your rights? Well?"

"...I will not," replied Masazumi. "We were to ensure Hashiba retired from the history recreation and we were to support Westphalia. ...Those roles are not yet over. So, Mouri Terumoto, we have no intention of transferring our rights to you."

"What are you talking about?"

Masazumi listened to what Terumoto said.

"Hashiba is attacking us. Don't you get that?"

"Let me ask one thing."

"Again with the questioning?"

"Yes. ...It's to ensure you don't make a fool of yourself."

Terumoto frowned at that.

But she must have been curious because she crossed her arms and lightly nodded.

Masazumi took that as permission to speak and did so with a tone of question in her voice.

"Where is Mouri at the moment?"

Ujinao mentally nodded at the Musashi Vice President's words.

*...So she is making her attack there.*

The standard negotiating tactic would be to invalidate Terumoto's use of the future as insurance by saying Mouri and Hashiba had yet to settle things between them.

After all, Terumoto's display of confidence was based on Musashi failing to stop Hashiba's invasion, but that assumed a victory on their part the following day.

Advancing things based on an uncertain factor was a gamble.

So the standard tactic would be to point that out and rebuke Terumoto for it.

*...But doing that would mean war.*

Mouri was here to fight.

Terumoto had set up this meeting to see if they could possibly resolve this

through negotiation instead of war.

If that was not possible, they only had to continue with the war as planned.

But the Musashi Vice President had avoided that risk.

Instead of trying to invalidate Terumoto's claim, she attacked a deficiency from a different viewpoint.

"Where is Mouri at the moment?"

The meaning of her question was simple: Mouri was here.

So...

"That is Hexagone Française in the west, not Mouri, correct?"

The Musashi Vice President had more to say.

"And if that is not Mouri in the west...then it is also not Hashiba in the west. Isn't that right?"

That was sophistry.

Ujinao knew the Musashi Vice President was trying to establish a falsehood using conflicting logic.

If Terumoto was going to lie, then the Musashi Vice President would twist the gap in that logic to establish a falsehood of her own.

*...That is ridiculous...*

But Terumoto had a simple response.

She shook her head and spoke.

"Sorry, but that isn't going to work."

Terumoto spread her arms in front of the Musashi Vice President.

"Listen. I am here speaking with you because you are here *in place of Hashiba*. ...Do you understand what that means?"

She stared at the Musashi Vice President.

*"That situation* no longer applies if that is not Hashiba in the west. Are you

sure you understand that, Musashi Vice President?"

She took in a breath and then let out words. She was speaking to this opponent who was taking the current situation too lightly.

"Listen." Strength filled her eyes and her words rose from her gut to her throat. "Our Roi-Soleil is actually taking this seriously for once. He insists that he will defeat Hashiba. And his preparations are quite good for something an idiot thought up. ...In other words, Hashiba is ignoring the history recreation and attacking Paris. Since Hashiba won't take it seriously, we've come here to complete the Invasion of Mouri against you. No, I guess we're the ones asking for it. ...To be attacked I mean, not something dirty!! You can only do this with us because that idiot is being an idiot in the west. Keep that in mind when you speak!!"

Masazumi hid a gasp when she heard Terumoto's shouted words.

*...She actually gave a legitimate response to my sophistry!*

Tsukinowa trembled on her shoulder and tried to pull back, so she supported him and reassessed her opinion of Terumoto.

Terumoto was not the type to force through a false accusation or irrational argument.

Her vainglory was backed by solid defensive and offensive arguments.

By the time Masazumi realized her mistake, it was too late.

Terumoto clapped her spread hands, producing a pleasant noise.

That loud sound seemed to be her cue to speak.

"Listen." Terumoto viewed Masazumi through the gap between her parting hands. "Our meeting here and the Invasion of Mouri are all thanks to my idiot. ...I am vainglory and he is pride. This time is a product of both, but are you going to waste it all, Musashi Vice President? ...Well, are you?"

"Then let me say this."

Masazumi held Tsukinowa.

Not because he was cute, but because she could not have him running away. After all...

"Are you stupid, Mouri Terumoto...!?" She raised her voice. "Hashiba has attacked you!? I know the truth of that nonsense! You have barely put up a defense against Hashiba's invasion over the past few days!"

**Unturning:** "Oh, so our analysis from the day before yesterday came in handy."

**Tachibana Husband:** "Isn't that great, Gin? ...The Musashi Vice President is using it as a weapon."

That was exactly right.

They had been monitoring Hexagone Française's actions recently.

They had been worried about Hashiba's invasion, but they had never expected what they found: "You let them attack you while barely defending? Are you stupid!? I'm guessing you were diverting some of your forces to come here and luring them deep inside Hexagone Française so they wouldn't notice your trip to Kantou!"

Tsukinowa bristled in fear, but she rubbed his back to get her thoughts through to him.

*Sorry, Tsukinowa. But this is definitely my only choice with her.*

In other words...

"You fool!"

This was an exchange of blows.

Masazumi clenched her right fist as she spoke.

"All you did was expose your headquarters to danger! If you didn't even understand that, you have no right to speak of ruling the world!"

"So you can talk tough, can you?"

Terumoto lowered her spread arms to her sides.

And she pointed her right hand at Masazumi.

"Do you want to rule the world that badly after you needed Anne to save your lives!?"

"You were in range of the dragon line reactor explosion too! Asama!"

"...Y-yes!"



A sign frame appeared by Mitotsudaira's hands and it displayed a map of the situation back then.

The area around Magdeburg was covered in red.

"Look! This is the estimated range of that dragon line reactor explosion! You were here! So you were protected by Anne as much as we were!"

**Asama:** "W-wait, can you give me a heads-up next time!? I about had a heart attack."

**Vice President:** "Well, I really just made that claim before even checking. Good thing I was right."

**Almost Everyone:** "Stop making that kind of gamble!"

But it was all about momentum here. It was now Masazumi's turn to swing her clenched right fist and point at Terumoto.

"Mouri Terumoto!"

*Umm, what should I say? Oh, I know.*

"We are still in the process of cornering Hashiba, but you allowed them to invade deep inside your territory because of this unnecessary plotting of yours. We cannot take responsibility for your actions! That is our opinion!"

**Flat Vassal:** "Huh? Wasn't our whole deal that we would accept anything in our international relations?"

**Novice:** "That's why she called it an opinion. The international rules can create unreasonable situations, so then we provide an 'opinion' for why we can't accept it. ...To put it another way, stating an opinion is a way of ending a topic of discussion."

**Four Eyes:** "Toussaint, can I search the divine network to see what site you pulled that from?"

**Mal-Ga:** "Oh, sorry. I already did. ...I'll send you the link."

**Novice:** "Why are you two messaging each other!?"

*I'm glad to see they get along, but they really need to stop doing diplomacy without me.*

Anyway, thought Masazumi with a sigh.

*...I can't use an opinion like this too often.*

If she used an opinion for everything, it would mean she was not following the proper international rules.

Using an opinion was the most unfair method available to them, but she had given a clear reason for using it.

They would not take responsibility for Mouri's self-destructive action.

That would be enough of a reason to excuse this opinion.

But that would make it more difficult to use this method in the future. So...

"If you object to our opinion, we can discuss it at a later opportunity."

That ended the discussion of Hashiba's invasion. If Terumoto objected, she had to wait until some other day. That would allow them to discuss what mattered at the moment. And...

"...How about that?"

She had used the enemy's own words to negate their claim about Hashiba's invasion.

Or she thought she had.

But Terumoto smiled.

"Hashiba invaded because we let them in? ...Of course we did. We had no other choice and we have a legitimate reason for doing so."

*...Huh?*

What possible reason had Mouri had for their self-destructive action?

Masazumi prepared herself for whatever was coming, but someone suddenly stepped up beside her.

It was Horizon.

The girl raised her right hand.

"I know the answer to that one."

"You do, Horizon?"

"Judge." Horizon nodded and spoke to Terumoto. "It was because of summer break, wasn't it?"

"Testament," confirmed Terumoto. "That's right. Summer break. Musashi, you can see why the Roi-Soleil is so excited, can't you? It will soon be summer break for you, for Hexagone Française, for Mouri, for Hashiba, for P.A. Oda, and for every other nation! Once that happens, school events take priority and all international politics will stop. But...with the exception of the history recreation."

So...

"We let Hashiba in because that was the history recreation of the Invasion of Mouri and we concluded we had to finish that before summer break began. ...Once we realized we could use the Siege of Odawara to double as the Invasion of Mouri, we changed the battlefield, but Hashiba apparently did not grasp our intention and seems intent on invading Paris."

She knew this argument only worked because she made her claim first.

But that was why she said it.

*...That's what vainglory is for...!*

Terumoto mentally clenched her teeth and played her role.

She had to justify their actions and demand Musashi take responsibility for not restraining Hashiba. Meaning...

"Up to a point, Hashiba's actions were an official history recreation of the Invasion of Mouri. They were Testament Union approved. And that happened because Musashi failed to stop Hashiba, correct?"

Terumoto slammed her right hand on the table.

A nice sound rang out and she roared her next line.

"Well!? Don't try to weasel out of this, Musashi! ...How are you going to take responsibility for Hashiba's invasion!?"

The Musashi Vice President was not moving.

But that stillness was not born of fear or nerves.

She calmly spread out a sign frame, breathed in, and looked to Terumoto.

*...Is she gonna do this?*

That sign frame apparently had a lot of information written on it. That was obvious enough from the way she occasionally looked down at it as if keeping time.

The enemy still intended to fight.

Terumoto fought to resist the smile she felt tugging on the corners of her mouth.

Just then, the Musashi Princess, who had stepped up next to the Musashi Vice President, pushed aside their Chancellor and raised her right hand.

"May I say one thing, Terumoto-sama?"

"Huh? What is it?"

"Judge," said the Musashi Princess.

She expressionlessly opened her mouth as Terumoto and the Musashi Vice President watched.

"You just posed a question and I provided a response: summer break. That was the correct answer."

Which meant...

"The Musashi side has won one point in this negotiation."

## **Chapter 20: Probing Girls on the Dueling Ground**

## 第二十章

### 『決闘場の手探り娘達』



意地を張ることは  
だからこそ  
その裏を梳かす  
配点 (真意)

*Being stubborn*

*Is exactly what*

*Untangles things behind the scenes*

### **Point Allocation (True Intent)**

Masazumi saw Terumoto's eyes widen and mouth spread horizontally.

*...Yeah...*

The sudden introduction of the Horizon rules was never good for your sanity.

She watched as Terumoto hung her head with her hands still on the table. A few seconds passed before her head shot up again.

Her bow-and-arrow hair decorations made a noise as she thrust her hand out to the right.

"Here, princess."

She grabbed the teacup offered to her and she tilted her head back to swallow the tea like it was alcohol.

She took a breath and slammed the teacup on the table.

"Are you stupid!? There is no point system here!"

*...Ah, you idiot.*

Masazumi thought that just as Horizon's gaze sharpened.

The automaton girl slowly nodded.

"There is. Because this is Musashi and I am Musashi's Vicereine. ...Thus, I am the rules here."

After that quiet announcement, Horizon nodded toward Terumoto.

"...That makes two points for us."

"You moron...!" Terumoto raised her voice and pointed at her feet. "This is a Mouri diplomatic ship! A diplomatic ship is an extraterritorial space. The laws of the ship's country apply on the ship! So you can't say this is Musashi!? Got

that!?"

"Oh? The laws of the ship's country apply on the ship? Then who gave permission for this ship to function as a diplomatic ship while it is *on the Musashi*?"

Horizon cut down her argument.

"Three points."

Ujinao thought about the exchange between Musashi's Princess and Terumoto.

*...This is so incredibly novel...*

Next to the Princess, the Musashi Vice President was drinking tea, typing on her sign frame keyboard, and...

"Sorry, Tsukinowa. That was scary, wasn't it?"

Did that mean she thought their Princess could handle it, or did she simply not want to get involved?

But the Mito Lord stepped forward from behind those two.

"May I say something, Hexagone Française Student Council President?"

That statement emphasized that they were from the same nation.

Ujinao listened to the half-Loup Garou while noting how nimble her movements were.

"As someone born in Hexagone Française, I think Hashiba's invasion is an unforgivable and illegal act, so I know exactly how you feel."

Ujinao assumed that Terumoto would agree with that statement.

However...

*...Mouri Terumoto?*

Terumoto did nothing.

She was motionless.

Ujinao sensed Terumoto.

But she did not move.

Just like the Musashi Vice President had earlier, Mouri Terumoto remained entirely motionless as if building up her strength.

Terumoto was suppressing her reaction to the statement from Musashi's silver wolf.

*...Why?*

Ujinao thought about why Terumoto would not agree with this.

"————"

And she realized that the silver wolf's words had been devastating for Terumoto.

Mitotsudaira gasped when she saw Terumoto's silence and motionlessness.

*...How good are her diplomatic senses...!?*

Mitotsudaira had made that statement based on an instruction Masazumi sent her via sign frame.

Masazumi had told her to call Hashiba's invasion "an unforgivable and illegal act".

Mitotsudaira had honestly not understood why, but she had figured it out after saying it.

That statement overturned everything Terumoto had been saying.

**Righteousness:** "Sorry, but what was that just now?"

**Silver Wolf:** "Judge. Masazumi set a trap for Terumoto."

She explained what that trap was.

**Silver Wolf:** "I called Hashiba's invasion an unforgivable and illegal act. ...If Mouri agrees with that, they will be calling Hashiba's actions illegal and thus *a violation of the international rules*. She would be agreeing with our previous

'opinion' that Hashiba's invasion was not our responsibility and she would also be establishing that both we and Mouri find it unforgivable. And if..."

If...

**Silver Wolf:** "If Terumoto does not accept this statement, it will mean Hexagone Française has accepted something illegal and unforgivable, placing them in violation of the international rules. ...Both responses place either Hashiba or Mouri in violation of the international rules, so Musashi can escape responsibility."

**Tachibana Wife:** "It sounds like sophistry to me, but I suppose that is why you are still in negotiation..."

"But," someone said.

**Flat Vassal:** "Why didn't you say this right away?"

**Vice President:** "Because she could have escaped."

Mitotsudaira nodded at what Masazumi said.

That was true.

This enemy wielded vainglory, attacked with rapid arguments, and swiftly fled out of harm's way.

**Vice President:** "So I had to wear down her argument until she had established Hashiba's invasion as an absolute fact. I made several attacks while waiting for her to proclaim the fact of Hashiba's invasion as an argument against us. That was the time to turn everything around. But..."

**Silver Wolf:** "If Horizon hadn't intervened, we might not have had time to pull everything together."

They had just barely made the timing.

Horizon had acted in order to buy them some time to set up the proper situation.

Of course, there was a trick to that.

"...Tomo."

Mitotsudaira had quietly called out and Asama had met her gaze and nodded.

Her king had stood in front of them and he had given a push on Horizon's back.

"Help us out a bit," he had whispered.

Horizon had nodded and had indeed helped them.

Asama had as well. She had been recording everything Terumoto said, checking for the parts that emphasized the Hashiba invasion, and sending them to Masazumi.

Masazumi had been able to instruct Mitotsudaira to say what she had because she had seen the frequency of Terumoto's relevant statements ramping up.

They had thought Terumoto might let her guard down if the statement came from someone else from her nation, but she had not fallen for it.

She had chosen silence so as to avoid either answer.

Looking back, it had taken all five of them to restrain Terumoto like this.

*...This is ridiculous.*

She had power.

She had vainglory and pride. She wielded that power to do as she pleased.

She was being restrained at the moment, but...

**Vice President:** "Here it comes."

Everyone tensed when they saw Masazumi's words.

Then they saw a quick motion.

Terumoto had started to lower her head, but it shot up again.

Just like before, the bow-and-arrow hair decorations made a noise, but her hair shook even more sharply than before.

And her exposed face revealed a sharp gaze directed their way.

Her closed mouth spread horizontally.

"You idiots."

They heard a familiar word in that short time.

"I went to all that trouble to let you save face while transferring your rights to us...but now war is the only option. What are you going to do about that?"

Terumoto sighed.

*...Honestly.*

"This means war."

Do you understand?

"Mouri's full power is effectively the same as Hexagone Française's. Recently, we've been working at our anti-ship attack methods, but what enemy do you think we were expecting when we did that?"

Her question received no response.

*I didn't really expect it to, she thought. No one would give the correct answer in this situation.*

But she wanted to hold the full rights to the Far East.

She had enough of a reason to want that. So...

"Let's fight a war, Musashi," said Terumoto. "Mouri and Hexagone Française will use this Invasion of Mouri to obtain all of Matsudaira's rights. ...We will inherit the Matsudaira name and rule this world. Got a problem with that?"

The Musashi Vice President looked her right back in the eye.

And the girl placed her anteater Mouse on her shoulder.

"A *giant* one."

**Azuma:** "Um, should we laugh at that?"

**Bell:** "Y-yes...I feel bad...for Masazumi."

**Sticky King:** "But that took guts, Masazumi! I am impressed!"

**Vice President:** "Ugh. You wouldn't believe me if I said that wasn't on

purpose, would you!?"

Masazumi sighed at the posts on her sign frame and thought, *They're the same as ever.*

But then she saw another message appear.

**Scarred:** "Why is Lady Terumoto so fixated on the right to rule the Far East?"

That was a good question.

Mouri was united with Hexagone Française, the ruler of Europe, so it would make sense that they would want to avoid having the decline of their clan cast a shadow on France's rule.

But it was odd to be this fixated on it.

*...Is there some other reason for this?*

Masazumi swung her right hand to the side as if to brush aside something unnecessary.

"Let me make one thing clear."

That being...

"We do not want war. If possible, we would like to resolve the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle and the Siege of Odawara without any fighting whatsoever."

**Wise Sister:** "Oh, dear. Have you gone insane?"

**Vice President:** "How does that warrant an 'oh, dear'!?"

She could not keep up with that crazy person's dialect.

But a report on the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle arrived from Neshinbara.

"Listen, Mouri Terumoto. Summer break is arriving soon, but you have completed your history recreations quite well. That means the Bitchu Takamatsu Castle will be your final history recreation of the first term."

That pointed to a certain fact.

"Are you listening?" Masazumi swung her right hand forward again and

clenched the fist before her eyes. "If the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle is limited to the actual siege lines around the castle, there will only be two initial rounds of attack and defense before the flooding begins. Some Mouri reinforcements led by Terumoto arrive afterwards, but they only end up staring down Hashiba and finally make peace."

Thus...

"Looking at the history recreation, you cannot use that to create a large battle between us and Mouri."

"Huh? ...Interpretations can take care of that easy."

It happened *again*.

Mouri was once again fixated on war.

No, what she wanted was to gain the right to succeed the Far East through war.

*...Why?*

*Her pride as a conqueror's wife? Pure greed? A means to provide peace to the Far East? Or...*

"—————"

One term in particular stood out to Masazumi.

It felt off. There was a discrepancy between the direction Terumoto was headed and the direction of Masazumi's thoughts.

*...The Far East?*

That term felt oddly off.

It was correct, but still wrong. It made her feel like she was mistaken about something. But...

*...This is dangerous!*

Her instincts sounded the alarm. She felt like she was bound to fail somewhere if she continued speaking with Terumoto like this.

The way things were, she could not follow what Terumoto was saying.

The danger was war. If they started the kind of war Terumoto wanted, it would end badly.

So Masazumi tried to speak to the others.

She wanted someone to buy her some time to prepare.

But just then...

"Hey, this is getting pretty complicated, so what's going on here?"

The idiot stepped forward.

Masazumi was somewhat surprised.

**Vice President:** "Hey, idiot. Are you interested in political negotiations now? Stop! Are you okay!?"

**Me:** "Th-think before you speak!"

But the idiot's presence was exactly what she needed.

Masazumi used her finger to write some text out on a sign frame and pushed it toward the idiot below the table.

She wrote it as simply as possible so even he would understand: *Buy some time*.

The idiot held it to his crotch.

"Ahn."

"Why are you making creepy noises!?"

"Huh!? I'm not sure a girl like you would understand even if I explained it! Or do you want me to keep explaining it until you get it!? I'll explain it as sensibly and sensitively as I can, but are you sure you want that!? Well!?"

"Just look at what it says!"

The idiot did so and then frowned.

"Um...what's this say? Buy some time?"

"Don't read it out loud!"

A coin flew in from the distance and struck the idiot in the side of the head. It produced a wonderful sound and sent him flying over the table with three flips.

**Mal-Ga:** "Yes! That was an amazing shot for this distance, Margot!"

**Gold Mar:** "Judge! We just keep improving our skills, Ga-chan. Let's aim for a more niche area next time!"

At least the Technohexen were doing well.

But as Masazumi nodded along, she realized something.

*...Now the idiot can't buy us any time!*

That was truly regrettable.

She wondered what to do and considered sending out another distraction.

But before she could, the idiot stood back up. He was now right next to Terumoto.

"Hi. You're the wife of that guy who copied my nudist shtick, aren't you?"

Terumoto turned toward Masazumi.

"Can I hit him?"

"That will mean another point for us," warned Horizon. "So what will you do?"

"Then I'll pass."

As Terumoto sighed, the idiot crossed his arms behind his head and spoke to her.

"War, huh?"

**Vice President:** "Waiiiit!!"

**Asama:** "Th-that's right, Toori-kun! No matter how much Masazumi loves war, we can't do it now!"

**Silver Wolf:** "That's right, my king! No matter how much Masazumi loves war, we can't do it now!"

**Wise Sister:** "Wait, you two! No matter how much Masazumi loves war, you can't say that now! You need to read between the lines of what my foolish brother is doing! Now, Masazumi! Enjoy your war."

**Vice President:** "Who is on whose side here!?"

Asama thought, *Masazumi's reactions are becoming more and more like Toori-kun's.*

She was not sure what to think of that, but she did think lively reactions were good for your mental health. It had to be far better than bottling things up.

*But, she thought.*

*...Are you serious, Toori-kun!?*

Accepting war was certainly one method of achieving world domination.

But doing so now was exactly what Mouri Terumoto wanted.

It may have been because of how shrine maidens used words, but Asama sensed something off about what Terumoto was saying. And Masazumi had to be feeling it even more.

It felt to Asama like Terumoto was using the same words as them while aiming for something different.

*...But for what?*

They could not agree to anything until they knew that. But...

"Toori-kun must have had an idea."

That quiet comment caused Mitotsudaira to turn toward her with a bitter smile.

"Tomo? You're supposed to say that with a sigh."

Terumoto was surprised by what the Musashi Chancellor said.

*...Does that idiot have some kind of plan?*

She had not expected them to agree with her without any caution

whatsoever.

*...Is he serious?*

She lightly gasped at this unexpected development.

No one said anything around her. She could only sense the scent of the tea and the blowing of the wind.

The afternoon had only just begun.

She took a breath while feeling the sunlight on her in the blue sky.

"...Okay."

She had cooled her head. She may have actually been overheating, but she chose to believe she had. Then she asked Musashi's idiot a question.

"Are you going to wage war against us?"

"Yeah. You're not gonna stop until we do, right?"

That was true.

And that was why she said what she did.

"This will mean war. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah, it is."

*...Is he serious?*

But there was no joy on her face.

Only surprise. That was the only emotion she could sense there.

Because this had been too easy. Also...

"Aoi!"

Based on the Musashi Vice President's tone, this was the Musashi Chancellor showing off. But the Chancellor/President's words had more authority than the Vice President's.

That meant it was all over for Musashi. No, the Far East itself was now unnecessary.

So Terumoto though, *Now I can bring it all to an end.*

"Okay, Musashi. Our war begins tomorrow, but-..."

"Ah, wait. Hold on."

The Musashi Chancellor held his right palm out toward her.

He stopped her, but why now?

"Chickening out?"

"I'm not gonna change my mind from one second to the next. It's just that all this talk of war reminded me that we have a prior engagement."

Namely...

"You there, the busty Houjou girl. ...We have a prior engagement with you."

Ujinao questioned the Musashi Chancellor's assertion.

"A prior engagement...?"

Had she and Musashi made any kind of agreement related to war?

She searched through her automaton memory, but found nothing.

*...I do not recall this.*

They had not discussed such a thing at IZUMO. And she had not held any kind of meeting with Musashi since then. So...

"What is this prior engagement?"

"There are two actually. Two."

*...Two?*

She could not recall even one, but now there were two.

What kind of promises had she made? She was confused as the Musashi Chancellor continued.

"The first is about Noriki."

That was an unexpected name.

It was like a physical blow from head-on, but...

"...Oh?"

She managed to restrict her reaction to just that.

That name reminded her of her past, but this was not the place for it.

Her high-speed automaton thoughts rebuked her over and over and she managed to recover.

Instead of suppressing her feelings, she calmed them. Just as she had done with so many things other than him: her nation, herself, *etc.*

"You call that a prior engagement?"

"Yeah. I mean, Noriki's gone to Suwa so he can fight you."

That was an unexpected fact.

It was like a physical blow from head-on, but...

"————"

She managed to restrict her reaction to just that.

That was an unexpected fact, but this was not the place for it.

Her high-speed automaton thoughts-

"He said something about pulling you down from your current position or destroying it or whatever."

That was an unexpected fact.

It was like a physical blow from head-on-

"Ujinao-sama! Ujinao-sama! Your reactions are looping!"

Kotarou pointed out her mistake, so she nodded.

"Using a stable method is the safest option, Kotarou."

"But that loop feels an awful lot like how a maiden in love would respond, Ujinao-sama."

"Oh? Kotarou, are you saying I am not a maiden?"

Ujinao smiled toward Kotarou and froze in place for about 2 seconds. Then she placed a hand over her mouth.

"...Hee hee. There's nothing wrong with it from time to time."

"Y-you're wasting your high-speed thoughts again, aren't you!?"

"Kotarou, you must make use of what functions you have."

"But what you're doing isn't *useful*! Ujinao-sama, are you once more going insa-...oops, almost went too far there!"

"This is an important meeting, so I am just a little nervous is all."

"Ahhhh! I hate how reasonable that sounds if you ignore what you're actually talking about!"

Kotarou was so cute when she flailed around like that.

But part of what Musashi had said had her interest.

"Musashi."

So she tried asking.

"You have told me one of the two prior engagements. So what is the other one? And if you do have a prior engagement with us in Houjou, does that really take precedence over Mouri?"

"Well, of course."

Ujinao sensed the Musashi Chancellor nod.

He crossed his arms and gave a dignified nod.

"I mean, you came to IZUMO, didn't you? You said you would welcome us in Kantou and you ate a bunch of the food I made in the nude."

She called up her memories and confirmed that was accurate.

She had drunk a lot back then.

She had also eaten a lot.

She remembered it tasting good, but the ingredients had come from that bar. So...

"You are a good cook."

"What you had there was nothing. ...But to get back on topic, that's what I mean."

What was what he meant? He explained.

"What you said still lives on within me. So..."

So...

"As promised, how are you going to welcome us now that we're in Kantou? Just so you know, everyone who was at that meeting — Hisahide, Yoshitsune, Yoshiyori — sided with us. Yoshiyasu is actually living with us now."

He then pointed at her.

"You're the only one that hasn't taken our side yet, so keep your promise."

*...That does sort of count as a prior engagement.*

Masazumi released the air from her lungs to calm her body's tension.

What had happened at that IZUMO bar had been a product of that specific discussion.

It had been less of a promise and more of a way to confirm each other's positions. Ujinao had simply been saying Musashi had to go to Kantou before they could truly do that.

So it was not an agreement between nations and it was not a definite promise.

That seemed to be why Ujinao said what she did.

"I do not believe I said much of anything in our discussion at that IZUMO bar. ...I did not state anything definitive about joining Musashi's side. So I have determined your interpretation goes too far."

*Yeah,* thought Masazumi.

But out of the corner of her eye, she saw the idiot scratching his head.

"Hmm..." He tilted his head. "Then why did you go to IZUMO?"

Ujinao froze in place when he asked that.

She remained expressionless for a few moments, but then she nodded.

And she provided an answer.

"To make trade arrangements."

*That's a lie,* thought Mitotsudaira.

It was obvious Ujinao had hesitated before answering.

*...Because what if?*

*What if she prioritized her promise with my king in order to assist Musashi?*

*What if she prioritized her promise with Noriki if he does come to meet her?*

Of course, Noriki's promise had been made without her input, but since she had avoided it...

*...Something must have happened.*

She must have had some kind of promise from back when Noriki was in Houjou.

She was trying not to touch on that.

And that led Mitotsudaira to realize something else.

**Silver Wolf:** "Masazumi. You know what this means, don't you?"

She had to have noticed.

**Silver Wolf:** "Houjou is the same."

"My, my. It would seem my daughter has noticed the signs."

Naito heard the Reine des Garous speak.

They were on Okutama's bow deck. They had gathered there to declare the end of the study camp and those not participating in the meeting up above had remained there.

Just in case, Naito and Naruze were using Schwarz Fräulein and a telescope spell to aim at the meeting area.

"It sure is hot..."

They were sipping at drinks below a parasol while they monitored the situation.

However, Naito turned back toward the Reine des Garous.

"Ture-yan, what signs are you talking about?"

"Hee hee. That is a se – cret. But," she added while turning back toward Kimi who was sunbathing on a bench. "The best women are the ones with secrets, aren't they?"

"Judge. I did say that long ago."

Kimi smiled bitterly and rolled over. She rolled from her stomach onto her back. She covered her chest with her hands as she was not wearing a bra.

"Long, long ago...I met a woman living in a Technohexen house deep in the dark forest. She asked me where I was going and where I had come from, so I smiled and told her that line."

"You mean...?"

What did that story have to do with anything? Naito felt like she knew, but also like she did not know.

If she performed a search, she would probably find the answer. But...

"The best women do not attempt to divulge secrets, do they?"

"Oh, well said."

The Reine des Garous sat on the bench prepared for her.

She brushed her massive hair back and spoke.

"But a wolf will not let her prey escape once she has noticed it. And the prey here are those signs. ...Now, what answer will she find?"

Masazumi trembled and she was not sure why.

All her body's hair bristled. The sensation ran from her toes and fingers to her spine and head, but it was not caused by fear.

*...Oh, no.*

She had noticed the signs before Mitotsudaira said anything.

No, she should say it was Mitotsudaira that had confirmed it for her.

And those two were not the only ones.

**Asama:** "Masazumi, about what Houjou-san just said..."

Masazumi viewed the words on her sign frame as a verification of her thoughts.

Asama had noticed something and she was typing it out for confirmation.

**Asama:** "Houjou-san also wants war. An official war with no kindness behind it."

Mitotsudaira nodded at Asama's observation.

*...That's right.*

Houjou had rejected what her king had said.

**Silver Wolf:** "She rejected the opportunity to take Musashi's side. ...But my king was talking about going to war in the first place."

Meaning...

**Silver Wolf:** "My king was talking about a war where they compromise and take our side. Since she rejected that, she must not want a war made up of interpretations and compromise."

*Excellent job getting that out of her, my king!*

**Hori-ko:** "Is that what you were doing, Toori-sama?"

**Me:** "Eh!? U-uhh! Yeah! Sure! Definitely!"

**Hori-ko:** "Really? Can you look me in the eye and say that?"

**Me:** "U-uuh... It just kind of worked out that way..."

*Must you two crush my respect for him?*

But looking at it like that, it made sense. Ujinao had avoided Noriki with the

talk of "trade" because...

*...She intends to fight a true war.*

Why? wondered Mitotsudaira.

She knew why Mouri would want that. They were trying to gain the right to rule the Far East.

*...Isn't that why Mouri Terumoto wants to have a proper battle with us?*

But why would Houjou want that as well?

"Kh..."

*What is it?* she thought while mentally clenching her teeth.

She was so close.

She felt so close to arriving at some incredible answer.

But she had too few signs. Several gears were missing, so the answer-revealing machine would not run.

Mouri and Houjou. Why did those two nations want war?

*...Why?*

Just as she thought that, she saw something in the distance.

It was a single aerial warship traveling west through Houjou's sky.

It was a flat-topped galley painted black.

*...Is that a P.A. Oda ship?*

No. It was probably a warship given to Takigawa by Houjou.

"Excuse me."

Mitotsudaira opened a telescope spell.

The image showed the southern sky shimmering in the summer air, but she focused in on the ship's bow.

The side of the ship bore the name Kanie Castle.

It was likely on the way to Takigawa's battlefield as part of her forces.

And Mitotsudaira realized something.

*...Why isn't P.A. Oda's Takigawa at this meeting?*

Mitotsudaira was briefly baffled.

If Takigawa's group was not there, it meant she was not working with Houjou and Mouri. At the very least, they were not working together closely enough to appear at this sort of international meeting.

That meant the P.A. Oda force was a diversion tactic being used by Houjou or Mouri. It was a factor meant to divert some of Musashi's forces elsewhere.

That meant Takigawa's group was not seen as very important, but it also meant they had some freedom as a P.A. Oda force and would be eliminating the defeat at the Battle of Komaki Nagakute in advance.

Thus, the three of them were not allies but were working together.

That was how it had looked until now. But...

*...What does this mean?*

Mouri was a powerful nation and Houjou was Kantou's representative nation.

They wished for war, but they had not spoken a word about their allies from P.A. Oda.

That was strange.

It did not make sense under the assumption that they wanted war.

*...What is it they want from this war?*

A certain word came to mind.

"...It's a secret, isn't it?"

Asama turned toward her and asked a question.

"A shared one, you mean?"

"No, this isn't about that," replied Mitotsudaira while looking away and feeling heat in her cheeks.

But the word secret fit the current situation well.

Mouri and Houjou. Those two representatives had to have a shared secret.

*...I just hope it's a simple one like my king's peeping.*

According to Kimi, her king did not want to peep. He wanted to use the peeping to have a shared secret with the other person.

*That discrepancy between method and objective is a lot like him,* thought Mitotsudaira.

"...!?"

She looked up.

It must have been a sharp movement because Horizon, her king, and Asama all turned her way. Houjou and Terumoto also glanced in her direction.

But she did not mind the attention.

She made up her mind and opened a sign frame so they could see. And...

*...Everyone.*

She used it to send a message to Asama, Horizon, Masazumi, and her king.

She spoke to Musashi's representatives here as a shared secret that the enemy could not see.

"Their method and objective are different," she said. "Mouri and Houjou's objective is not something they will gain in the war. ...It is something beyond that. They are using a victory in war as the means to gain something else."

Her king used his peeping to gain a shared secret with the other person, not anything he actually saw with his eyes.

So what was it Mouri and Houjou wanted here?

If Musashi was the peeping victim, then Mouri and Houjou wanted a shared secret with them.

It had to be something Mouri and Houjou would gain via war.

It would be the full rights of Matsudaira, just like Mouri had said. *In that case,* thought Mitotsudaira.

What were they trying to share by gaining those Matsudaira rights?

She did not know.

But this was as far as she would get. After sticking with her king and stating her clever opinion, the wolf came to a stop.

Because...

"Masazumi!"

There was someone else here who could better bare her fangs in the political field.

They had their Vice President who had full authority over Musashi's negotiations.

So Mitotsudaira spoke to her via sign frame.

"The wolf will only carry you this far. So you follow the path from here, Masazumi. What would happen if Mouri, the bearers of one conqueror's path, gained the full authority of Matsudaira? And what can Houjou gain from that result? The point in common between those two things is the answer to everything!"

She sent her words toward someone's back.

That back had not moved or reacted at all to her words.

It was Masazumi.

But now she moved.

She slowly raised her right hand and breathed in.

Then Mitotsudaira heard Masazumi's words. It was the same thing she always said when gathering her thoughts.

"Can I say one thing?" she asked.

Masazumi realized what that bristling feeling had been.

Mitotsudaira had provided a lot of help here. She likely had her thoughts on the matter since they were up against Hexagone Française here ...*I should*

*probably treat her to yakiniku when we get back. ...I hope my part-time pay is enough...*

While wondering about that, Masazumi began speaking.

"I mostly understand this now, so let me make something clear about the initial topic."

That being...

"Mouri Terumoto, I cannot transfer Matsudaira's rights to you."

Terumoto kept her arms crossed and her expression unchanged. She continued staring at Masazumi with her eyebrows somewhat raised and no smile on her lips.

*...That's fine.*

Masazumi had yet to strike at the core of her opponent.

So she looked away from Terumoto and toward Ujinao.

"Houjou Ujinao. We will wage war with you."

"But..."

Masazumi did not nod.

"As far as Mouri is concerned, I do not think we should fight Bitchu Takamatsu Castle any more than necessary. ...But Matsudaira had a lot to do with Odawara."

**Novice:** "That's right. People often focus only on the flooding part, but that only happened after several supporting castles fell and Houjou reinforcements were kept away. ...Houjou has not fought any of the battles in which those supporting castles were defeated, so I think that is why they are talking of a major war now."

**Four Eyes:** "Continue. I'm taking notes."

**Worshiper:** "...I assume everyone knows the answer and just isn't saying anything, but taking notes for what?"

**Four Eyes:** "I like to copy dialogue down by hand."

**Almost Everyone:** "Eeeek."

They really never changed.

But Neshinbara was right.

"Houjou must fight a major war if they are to follow the Testament. ...But we will not make that a largescale war."

"...Hey."

Terumoto called out to her, but Masazumi ignored her.

"Houjou Ujinao. ...I would like to carry out the Siege of Odawara as a series of duels based on the supporting castle battles and the actual Odawara siege."

She placed her hands on the table, took a breath, and opened her mouth.

"As a representative of Musashi, I, Vice President Honda Masazumi, have a request for Mouri and Houjou."

She lowered her head as she continued.

"Mouri and Houjou. As Matsudaira, Musashi would like to form an alliance with your two nations."

She had said it.

And a moment later, Terumoto responded.

"No. I can't agree to that."

Terumoto gave her answer.

They had indeed considered an alliance with Musashi at this point.

After all...

*...Something would happen if Matsudaira joined us to form a single large force.*

The Musashi Vice President had to know what would happen. So...

"If you have anything to say, then say it."

She did not need to tell the girl to raise her head.

The Musashi Vice President was already directly facing her.

Her bangs shook and her cheeks were somewhat flushed.

It was a look of expectation concerning what she was about to say. It was the look of a girl who knew she could rejoice in herself.

It was an excellent look.

Her glossy lips moved to form the words.

"Then I will say it."

Masazumi spoke to Terumoto.

"I know what Mouri and Houjou hope for after waging war with Musashi. First of all..."

*This is the entrance*, she told herself.

"You want to liberate Kantou from Hashiba."

# Chapter 21: Debating Girls at the Debate Table

## 第二十一章

### 『議論場の議論娘達』



夢とは  
広いものか  
遠いものか  
配点 (いつか)

*Are dreams*

*Wide*

*Or distant?*

### **Point Allocation (One Day)**

**Flat Vassal:** "...Eh? Why would a war with Mouri and Houjou liberate Kantou?"

Masazumi looked up when she saw Adele's question.

She took her eyes off of Terumoto and Ujinao and she stared into the distance.

*...It really is summer.*

With that thought, she lowered her gaze once more.

She was glad they were outside. Being able to stare into the distance allowed her to reset her mood.

She suppressed her exhilaration and looked to her sign frame instead of Terumoto. And...

**Vice President:** "That is a good question, Adele."

Why would Musashi fighting Mouri and Houjou bring about the liberation of Kantou?

**Vice President:** "Because an existence with great authority will be created here."

It was obvious if you thought carefully about it.

Mouri had been insisting that Musashi transfer them the rights to Matsudaira's authority. With war as the alternative.

But Musashi could do the same thing. So if war did break out and Mouri lost, *Musashi could have the rights to Mouri's authority transferred to them.*

*...That means this war will result in Musashi, Mouri, and Hexagone Française merging or uniting in some way.*

What would happen if Europe's conqueror and the Far East's future ruler were joined through the Siege of Odawara?

**Vice President:** "The result would be a nation carrying such a powerful history recreation that not even the Testament Union could restrain them. ...Hashiba will not like this war. If it qualifies as a history recreation, two powerful conquerors will be joined as one."

**10ZO:** "But what will Hashiba do about it?"

**Vice President:** "They will have to intervene."

It was a simple matter.

**Vice President:** "Hashiba is not present for the current Siege of Odawara. They are also failing to participate in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle. That gives them the right to intervene in this war. And if they manage to defeat Musashi and Mouri in the process..."

Masazumi explained.

**Vice President:** "With the Testament Union under their control, Hashiba can rule over Mouri and Matsudaira to become the greatest power in the Far East."

**Novice:** "This was a good decision. Because even if Hashiba has a large force in Kantou, that is not Hashiba's main fleet. I doubt Hashiba's control of them is perfect. So while Hexagone Française holds Hashiba in place, Mouri and Houjou will quickly complete their war. Once they absorb Musashi, they intend to use that triple union to crush Hashiba's Kantou forces."

**Righteousness:** "...So that's what you meant by liberating Kantou!"

Yoshiyasu's surprise was to be expected.

**Righteousness:** "Houjou was plotting this right under Mlasi P.A. Oda's nose...?"

Ujinao nodded at the Musashi Vice President's words.

That was a future they could bring about with this war. Meaning...

*...To retake Kantou from Hashiba.*

The great authority that would result from the Siege of Odawara would act as bait to lure Hashiba in to be attacked.

That was why they had gotten P.A. Oda's Takigawa involved.

She would not deny this was underhanded.

If they went this far, Hashiba was sure to have its Kantou forces intervene.

Given the exhaustion of Houjou's forces and Takigawa's situation, Hashiba would move in to take it all for themselves.

But that was precisely when Kantou would be liberated.

That was their plan.

The plan required the creation of such a great authority, so they had needed to push Musashi to war and urge them to transfer their authority.

It was certainly forceful.

But Mouri was prepared to risk their own nation's authority in exchange.

Hashiba would never overlook a fight for the combined authority of the Far East's future ruler and Europe's conqueror.

Hashiba would likely interrupt during the midpoint when the winner and loser were decided.

They would add to the large force occupying Edo and Satomi and they would send any free P.A. Oda personnel to Kantou.

This would be far greater than a battle on Houjou land.

*But,* thought Ujinao.

*This is the only time at which we can liberate Kantou from Hashiba.*

Their preliminary calculations said they could fight Hashiba if these three nations joined together.

Hashiba's main force would not be present.

So it would work.

*...And we will have revenge.*

She thought back to when Musashi had fought the Battle of Mikatagahara. She had seen Edo and Satomi devastated and occupied.

The Houjou Association of Indian States was Mlasi and close to P.A. Oda. That had prevented them from acting carelessly. And their actions would not have changed the overall outcome.

But Edo and Satomi had been occupied.

So Ujinao had made a decision.

She had decided it was her duty to take Kantou back.

And she had concluded that it was the Kantou way to hope Musashi survived to the end.

If possible, she wanted to protect the ship *he* was aboard.

Her public face stubbornly insisted on war while her private face hoped for the opposite.

Was it a good or bad thing that he was not currently on the Musashi?

If it was a good thing, this would be easier on her.

So she spoke.

"What will you do, Musashi Vice President? ...Your decision here could earn your nation the right to rule this entire world."

"I am aware of that."

The Musashi Vice President faced her and spoke clearly.

And she raised the hands she had placed on the table.

She moved.

She turned toward the gentle wind – toward Terumoto.

Then she spoke to Terumoto.

"Do you still want war?"

Masazumi saw Terumoto nod in response to her question.

"Yes."

It was a solid nod. Her expression looked somewhat relaxed, but almost like...  
*...Like she's saying "if you insist".*

Masazumi understood why that look covered her face. Because...

"Mouri and Hexagone Française. ...I understand now why you want the right to rule the Far East."

"Oh, do you now?"

"Judge," replied Masazumi. And...

*...In a way, my next words will be the greatest "sign".*

With that in mind, she slowly uttered the words.

"For the world. ...Not for 'the Far East', but for 'the world'. Isn't that right?"

Terumoto stopped moving.

She had intended to dodge the issue. She had intended to show no reaction whatsoever to whatever the girl might say. However...

*...Crap.*

She could not use her vainglory.

The Musashi Vice President's line was too straightforward for her to dodge and she could not block it with her vainglory either.

"...Damn."

Terumoto covered her face with her right hand.

"Sorry!" she shouted. "My bad, Exiv! They caught on!!!"

Laughter echoed from atop a mansion in central Paris.

It came from the Roi-Soleil. He sat on the roof, held his stomach, and laughed.

"Ha ha ha...! Oh, how funny!"

He allowed himself to laugh.

*We may be facing a major battle, my subjects, but please allow me to laugh like an idiot. Because...*

"Terumoto, to think our shared secret would be discovered by our greatest enemy! It seems your vainglory failed to mask your own joy!"

*Honestly, Musashi's Vice President is something else.*

"Terumoto, you are so cute. And pretty too. I know that brief look on your face in the instant your own unwanted joy removes your mask of vainglory."

The Roi-Soleil embraced the *signe cadre* and bent backwards.

"Just imagining it is making me tremble, Terumoto."

Asama saw Terumoto smash a nearby sign frame with a swift punch.

...Wow...

**Silver Wolf:** "What an odd expression of love..."

**Hori-ko:** "I see. I could learn from her."

**Silver Wolf:** "Y-you don't have to use that on my king! You don't!"

But Terumoto sighed while the light of the shattered sign frame washed over her.

"Hey, Musashi Vice President. What will you do?"

...Eh?

Asama did not understand Terumoto's question.

**Asama:** "Umm, Masazumi? What did you mean when you said 'the world' like you were turning into Neshinbara-kun?"

**Novice:** "No, Asama-kun! If it was me, I would say 'the world...!?' "

**Four Eyes:** "Oh? The next time I'm reading one of your books in front of you, I'll make sure to read lines like that aloud."

**Novice:** "Please no!"

But what had that meant?

Masazumi responded while her shoulders relaxed.

"Hexagone Française carries an incredible ambition. And they desire any and all power to make it a reality. This has led them to the right to rule the Far East, which can be seen as full authority over the current world."

What would they use that for?

Masazumi spread her hands and explained.

"Hexagone Française intends to leave for the outside world and conquer the true Europe."

The Roi-Soleil reached toward the broken *signe cadre*'s shards.

Terumoto was beyond them. That was a fact. So on the rooftop, he grabbed the scattered shards of light and embraced them as if rubbing them on his body.

"Terumoto..."

Another *signe cadre* appeared nearby and immediately exploded.

The people working down below watched as the Roi-Soleil flipped along the roof seven times and fell off.

"Okay, everyone. Back to work."

They all returned to their respective work.

"If you've figured it out, you've figured it out."

Masazumi heard Terumoto say that.

Mouri's leader moved her right hand as if to scoop something up within it.

"The future we picture in our mind's eye is one of fully conquering the outside world. Because once Matsudaira's rule begins after Sekigahara, it will be difficult for the other nations to do much of anything in the Far East. ...Part of it is dependent on the coming age and Westphalia, but there will be conflict over

how the history recreation of Matsudaira's rule can coexist with the provisional rule of the Far East. So..."

"You plan to leave for the outside world?"

"Testament. If any nation can settle the outside world, it would be Tres España and us. After all, you can't hope to settle the outside world without aerial warships and *Lourd de Marionnettes*. And we have a lot of nonhumans, so we have greater odds of survival in that harsh land."

"B-but how much would really be gained by doing that...?" asked Asama.

Shinto provided support across the entire Far East, but they did not yet reach the outside world.

Asama could easily imagine the hardships of leaving those Shinto divine protections.

But Terumoto had an answer.

"How much would be gained? We could liberate the Far East from the provisional rule. And if we secure the land early, we get first pick and we can even take over the territory of other nations and lease or sell it to them. Do you have any idea how much we could profit from selling off pieces of the world? Also..."

Also...

"Well, from a more personal perspective, I want to see the world that Hexagone Française was meant to have. And from a more practical perspective, the outside world's Hexagone Française is nearly twice the size of the Far East. There is a desire to own at least twice as much land instead of ruling the Far East. If we became the true conquerors of Europe, our influence would reach much further. Especially if we implemented that land leasing strategy I mentioned."

*I see*, thought Masazumi. The nations were testing out different methods of settling the outside world. It was still unknown how much success they would have, but they were at least making the attempt. However...

"Mouri Terumoto. ...Where did you get this idea?"

Attempting to leave the Far East was an absurd idea.

But Terumoto frowned when questioned about it.

"Don't you remember your negotiation in England? You're the one that said Musashi would support anyone who attempted to settle the outside world."

*...Oh, right! That!!*

Masazumi felt a cold sweat in her heart. She had unwittingly pulled a trigger within an unexpected person.

But she did not deny her own words. And she understood what this meant.

*...That's right.*

She had been addressing the entire world back then.

So if any nation would settle the outside world, Matsudaira would support them.

But Hexagone Française wanted to avoid as much risk as possible in that endeavor.

So they wanted full authority.

They wanted the backing of the entire Far East as they risked their nation on it.

But Musashi could not support just Hexagone Française after what they had said at England. If they did, England would protest since the meeting had occurred there.

That had of course been addressed to all of the nations, but Terumoto shook her head.

"Hexagone Française cannot allow England to take the lead. So while we drive Hashiba's forces out of Kantou, I thought we could also take your authority for ourselves."

Now.

"What will you do, Musashi? ...If we fight over each other's authority, Hashiba

is bound to intervene to take it all for themselves. If we ally ourselves here, we won't wear down our forces and we won't create a single powerful authority, so Hashiba has to act cautiously."

"There's a simple answer to that." Masazumi raised a hand. "We go to war with Hashiba."

Masazumi saw countless sign frames well up around her.

They displayed everyone's faces, including Ookubo and Yoshiyasu's.

Neshinbara's was in the center and he swung his hands down.

On a count of three, he swung them back up and everyone responded in unison.

"That's not the answer!!"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. Masazumi, you just couldn't hold it in any longer, could you!? Now raze Kantou and subjugate them all! It's high time they trembled in fear of a warmonger's impatience!"

**Vice President:** "No, wait! I have a real reason for saying that!"

**Mal-Ga:** You do realize your reason will be entirely meaningless to people with a different set of values, don't you?"

**Vice President:** "No, it isn't about that! We'll work with Mouri and Houjou to liberate Kantou!"

**Silver Wolf:** "But...how? We can't form an alliance."

Masazumi sent her voice to them all in response to Mitotsudaira.

**Vice President:** "Have you forgotten that our home base at Edo was occupied? There is a perfect history recreation for taking it back, isn't there?"

**Righteousness:** "Hashiba's second Korean expedition. ...The Keichou Campaign!"

Yoshiyasu came to a stop as she walked along Okutama's bow deck to meet the others.

*...It's finally happening! The Kantou Liberation is here!*

She shivered despite standing in the summer sun.

"The Kantou Liberation. And the Keichou Campaign too..."

The Keichou Campaign was the history recreation of Hashiba's expedition to the Korean Peninsula that occurred at a later time.

The Hashiba forces had retreated from the peninsula when Hashiba died back in the Far East, but...

"We're doing the history recreation of that here...!?"

"Wait."

Masazumi heard Terumoto speak.

"Hey, how are you planning to liberate Kantou? We don't have the authority to take part in that history recreation. And we gain nothing from it. It would be a waste of our forces."

"Judge," agreed Masazumi.

There was an answer to both of Mouri's concerns. She began with the second one: what they would gain from it.

"Listen, Mouri Terumoto. Listen carefully. If you do everything in your power to help liberate Kantou, something otherwise impossible will happen: Every last Kantou nation will support Mouri. Do you understand what that means?"

"Huh? What does that matt-..."

Terumoto's expression changed.

Her eyes briefly widened and then she brought a hand to her chin and lowered her head.

After a while...

"So that's it..."

"Eh!? What, what!?"

The idiot started hopping side to side behind Terumoto, but Masazumi did her best to ignore him. *Mitotsudaira, if you could remove him with your silver chains, that would be great.*

Meanwhile, Terumoto looked up.

"That's not a bad idea. ...It's not the same as full authority over the Far East, but it's still significant."

"Yes," agreed Masazumi as a question reached her sign frame.

**Bell:** "Eh? Wh-what does...that mean?"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. She's gone crazy! Masazumi's war power has filled her with a desire for war, so she no longer cares about the details! That's it, isn't it!?"

**Vice President:** "No, it isn't."

She heard a voice from below shouting "You're no fun!", but how far could that entertainer project her voice?

But one member of their class did understand.

**Smoking Girl:** "Suzu, think about the map. And not just of the Far East, of the entire world."

Yes. It was obvious when one viewed the full map of the world that was created from the records passed down since the Age of the Gods.

**Smoking Girl:** "The Far East is located east of the main continent. So if anyone tries to settle the outside world, the closest area is the east coast of that continent. Corresponding back to the Far East, that's Kantou. Meaning..."

Meaning...

**Smoking Girl:** "If Hexagone Française helps liberate Kantou, they will receive the support of the continent's eastern nations when they begin settling the outside world. ...Receiving the willing assistance of other nations can actually be less work than taking full authority and doing it yourself. Isn't that right?"

**Vice President:** "That's right. Traveling to the west end of the continent is

sure to be a challenge, so having a bridgehead on the continent would mean a lot."

That just left one thing.

"Musashi Vice President, there is one problem."

Terumoto stated that "problem".

"How are we supposed to involve ourselves in the Kantou Liberation? Mouri has no right to do so."

"Then I have a request." Masazumi reached her right hand across the table. "I'm not asking for much and I won't ask for an alliance. But will you take my hand, Mouri Terumoto? Take my hand and I will tell you how you can participate in the Kantou Liberation. ...I apologize for acting all high and mighty when we're the ones asking you for help, but the decision is yours now."

Masazumi had spread her arms and held out a hand.

And she waited patiently for Terumoto.

Terumoto hesitated. Could she really be the one to decide everything here?

Her original plans had fallen apart and she was trying to work her way into the new flow of events.

Even if Mouri's forces would follow her command, this would greatly change their plans.

That was sure to cause some friction.

"—————"

*Damn*, she thought.

*...I can't find any vainglory at times like this.*

A little vainglory would handle this with ease, but what could she do without it?

*I'm kind of a pain in the ass*, she thought while taking in a breath.

Just then, the person waiting by her side began to move.

It was Mouri-01. She held something up in front of Terumoto.

It was a *signe cadre*.

The message written there was from the idiot back home.

...*Come on now*.

She had assumed it contained instructions for her decision, since he was the national ruler, but...

"Terumoto, I would like a souvenir when you return."

Namely...

"I want to hear all about everything you do there."

"Fine then!!"

Terumoto swung her right hand.

With a snapping motion, she solidly slapped the Musashi Vice President's hand.

"This is how I show my agreement. I'm not about to shake hands like we're pals! Remember that!!"

Then she asked what she was most curious about right now.

"So how are you going to get us involved!?"

"We make a deal."

The Musashi Vice President's voice sounded dignified as she raised her hand which was red from the slap.

"Here, Mouri has asked Musashi for support because Hashiba's failure kept you from fighting the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle. In exchange, Musashi has a request for Mouri."

That being...

"As Satomi's protectors, Musashi must liberate Edo and Satomi via the Keichou Campaign, but our forces are not up to the task. So we would like to request Mouri's assistance."

*This means war*, thought Masazumi.

They were fast approaching a major war that would reshape the map of the Far East.

"First, the Houjou battle."

There was a bit of a process for that one. After all...

"We are basing it on the Siege of Odawara, but we must also hold the history recreation of the Tensho Jingo Conflict that precedes it."

The Tensho Jingo Conflict was a battle that occurred immediately after the Battle of Kanagawa.

Houjou and Matsudaira would fight over the portion of Kantou left open when Takigawa left and they would ultimately make peace.

That looked like a draw, but it would actually give Matsudaira an advantage.

Houjou would use that battle to approach Matsudaira, but...

"If we are going to use that as the opening battle for the Siege of Odawara duels, we need to think of some way of handling that. The problem is related to your personnel if we really do fight this battle using duels..."

"Testament. If both the Tensho Jingo Conflict and the Siege of Odawara are fought primarily via duels, it will put too great a burden on us. We mostly only have four fighters: me, Kotarou, and two others. I would appreciate it if we were given some reinforcements."

"Then I'll provide whatever you lack," said Terumoto as she looked left, toward the stern. "Those are our *Belle de Marionnettes*. Houjou has a lot of them too, but Houjou's mostly have identical, mass-produced personalities, while ours can act as individual commanders. So if we're gonna send you anyone, it should probably be them. ...How about it, Houjou? As the #1 *Belle de Marionnette* producer in the east, you'll probably be ashamed to ask, but do you want the help of our forces?"

Ujinao immediately nodded in response to Terumoto's question.

It looked like she had already given it deep thought, so she must have used the high-speed thoughts of a *Belle de Marionnette*.

So Ujinao lowered her head toward Terumoto.

"Testament. If you are willing to spare some in the name of cooperation."

"Sure thing." Terumoto smiled bitterly. "Think of it as our payment for letting us fight our battle here. And we can't fight too hard in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, so helping out like this means a lot. Also..."

Also...

"If we win those duels, it'll give us an advantage in the negotiations afterwards."

*...Impressive.*

This was what war was.

Masazumi accepted it as the cruelty of reality, and...

"I hope you aren't thinking of holding back in these duels just because we hope to work together toward liberating Kantou."

"Of course not. ...My policy is to take every win I can get. You know what that means?" asked Terumoto. "Let your guard down, and we'll take everything for ourselves instead of working together with you."

"We will make an effort to ensure we can thank you for the warning."

Ujinao nodded and opened a sign frame.

She called up a map of Odawara.

"I will also call for the P.A. Oda forces in our territory to make up for our limited personnel. Their enemy is you, Musashi. And Hashiba's primary goal will be to protect Takigawa while she shows off here." She raised her eyebrows somewhat. "And now that our respective positions are clear, let me tell you something else. ...Sanada and Hashiba are working out a way to have the Siege of Kanie Castle double as Sanada's 2nd Siege of Ueda."

*...So that's what they're doing.*

Masazumi was impressed by what Ujinao revealed. This was another major card played right at the end.

"Thank you for telling us that, Houjou Ujinao. ...Sanada is focused on the Osaka Campaign, aren't they? Completing the 2nd Siege of Ueda in advance will also benefit us, so we will accept that. And the Hashiba forces in Kantou are sure to take action during the Siege of Kanie Castle. When they do..."

Terumoto nodded.

"If Hashiba tries anything while we're fighting over each other's authority in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, we will respond immediately."

Just as Terumoto said that, an unfamiliar voice reached them.

"That would be a problem."

Except it was not even a voice.

*...Noise?*

It was a lot like hearing words formed from loudspeaker static.

"Shall I interpret that as a declaration of war against Hashiba?"

Then it appeared.

It was light. A blue light stood about 20 meters to Masazumi's left.

It had a humanoid form and it carried a weapon.

*...A warrior!?*

Asama saw the humanoid figure made of wrapped light. She also saw something react to it: sign frames.

They were from the Asama Shrine and the Mouri clan and they created something.

*...A force barrier!*

Those were used to capture ether lifeforms and prevent them from attacking.

The ship's defense system and Asama's own techniques swiftly activated two or three of them which bound this figure.

And then...

"———!?"

The light burst.

The figure standing in the center of the barrier held a sword at his hip.

The barrier sign frames all shattered at once.

But a few of Asama's barriers were still intact. And she saw that the barriers were restraining and slowing the figure down, but he was not stopped altogether.

*...Wait a second! This barrier was designed to restrain something on the level of a small dragon!*

Yet this figure could shatter that and continue moving.

He looked like a lightly-armored warrior. He was a young man wearing an M.H.R.R. uniform. But his entire body was glowing with a blue light and his arms, legs, and face were all covered by what looked like wrapped paper with writing all over it.

Writing of the same material scattered from the glowing paper. It rang like a small bell, but...

"...He isn't human! He's a program!?"

She questioned it because she had never seen anything like this before.

*...Is this a lifeform made from a program?*

That was similar to a Mouse, but the data density was greater than a Mouse's and he had human movements.

Then what was he?

Whatever he was, he spoke as he was pierced by several of the barrier sign frames.

"It is a pleasure to meet you. ...I am Ootani Yoshitsugu and I was sent here by Hashiba-sama to oversee the Siege of Odawara."

While shattering the barriers and with writing spilling from his body, he

bowed with a strained motion.

"I arrived in advance of my companions, but this ship proved difficult to board."

"Well, yeah. We'd activated the security. But what are you? You didn't drop down from above when you appeared. It felt more like you rose up from within the ship," pointed out Terumoto. "Which means through the ether pathways. Or if you are a program...through a divine transmission."

"Testament." Ootani nodded. "Technically, I am not a program. Because I am...a virus. Now," he said. "Let me hear your decision. Will you or will you not make an enemy of Hashiba-sama?"

# Afterword

That was Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 6-A.

This one was all about strategizing from where the last volume left off, so it supported the topics advanced last time and discussed what they would do about the next war.

Actual war also follows international rules and is supported by them when a justification is given and a declaration of war is made, so this can't be easy for any nation.

Winning isn't everything and it's pretty important that you also show how the war was justified, but they struggled with that a lot in the age discussed here.

The lack of fast and reliable communications in particular led to a general belief that you only had to utterly destroy your enemy to win, but I also think you had to have a really positive outlook to get by in that world. So in that age, it was very important to maintain diplomatic relations with other clans. Things like political marriages were used as a form of hostage insurance by having a close relative in another clan, but that relative also had to act as a diplomat who could communicate with the other clan right away. Being a woman back then could not have been easy.

Anyway, the chat.

"Got any painful stories from your school days?"

"I remembered one a few days ago, but I forget what it was."

"I've been doing this for a while, but that answer is a new one!!"

"Yeah, I tried to come up with another one, but I couldn't come up with much. Only this one time my friend and I were riding our bikes back from school. We held each other's handlebars for something akin to a three-legged race, but then we couldn't avoid the cliff and my friend fell off."

"Why didn't you fall off?"

"That's the weird part. On the corner before the cliff, I shouted 'watch out!!' and kicked my friend's bike away so I wouldn't fall too."

"Sounds like you're the one he had to watch out for. So what happened to him?"

"There was a rice paddy below. The bike and my friend were embedded in it like something out of a manga. He just washed off in the waterway and went home. I really miss those times."

"These days, that would have been all over the online news..."

And elsewhere. Now, my work background music this time was Sanagi by Possibility. It has some nice lyrics for this kind of preparation and smoldering. Anyway...

"Who most hopes for the future?"

I'll leave you with that. Wait just a bit for the next part.

March 2013. A pollen-y morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

# Notes

1.   ↑ The kanji for Koroku can be interpreted as an abbreviation of Elementary School 6th Year.
2.   ↑ An alternate reading of Koroku.
3.   ↑ The screen names Novice and Laborer look sort of similar in Japanese.
4.   ↑ The Japanese spelling is almost identical to Rusher Kimura.
5.   ↑ The name is pronounced the same as the Japanese term for “cooking the books”.
6.   ↑ Demon Guardian and meat rod are pronounced similarly in Japanese.
7.   ↑ The word Masazumi used for protest is pronounced the same as the previous chapter's "oral techniques", but uses different kanji.